MOURNING AND THE TELEVISUAL:
THE CASE OF WALTER BENJAMIN

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For Rodnie

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The dissertation is an inquiry into the poetics of mourning in the age of the electronic image. Walter Benjamin serves as a case study of a "haunting" in academic cultural studies. From the first biographical portraits by Hannah Arendt and Susan Sontag, Benjamin's legacy has assumed an allegorical dimension in intellectual popular culture. As print literacy undergoes a transition into new electronic forms, Benjamin appears as an example of how the death cult of the author can be remade in a televisual mode.

As part of the massive cultural and geographic displacements of modernity, TV offers a simulation of a missing home and community. Through its coverage of catastrophe and total war TV also becomes a medium by which we negotiate our relations with the dead. An investigation

of Benjamin's historical relation to TV reveals the origins of the medium in the Nazi state that drove Benjamin into fatal exile. Here Benjamin's story forms a conjunction with the cult movie Casablanca, Hollywood's representation of the fall of Paris and the prototype for all of those TV reruns that have begun to redefine collective memory.

Casablanca serves as a microsm for the "global village" under the hegemony of American popular culture in the same way that the Paris arcades served for Benjamin as a model for the emerging consumer culture of the nineteenth century. I argue, drawing on Benjamin's theory of the dialectical image, that the violence sanctioned by electronic techno-culture and displaced onto images of homelessness has condensed in the aura now attached to Benjamin's posthumous image.

Before fleeing Paris in 1940 Benjamin entrusted to George Bataille certain cases of his manuscripts that were hidden in the French National Library for the duration of the war. Theodor Adorno became the first editor of Benjamin's writings in the aftermath of the Holocaust. A comparison of Bataille's and Adorno's respective concerns with sacrifice and mourning is made in the context of the Frankfurt School critique of the culture industry. Behind TV's screen memories I seek to uncover the historical experience Benjamin perceived to be buried with August Blanqui and the cult of the revolutionary tradition.

INTRODUCTION

The 1936 Berlin Olympics, as well as providing the sets for Leni Riefenstahl's masterpiece of Nazi propaganda Olympia, also served as the site of the first "live" television broadcast.[1] Among the crowds attending this global sports event that simultaneously appeared on screens in several reception halls in Berlin was the French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan, who had only the day before delivered an early version of his paper "The Mirror Stage" at Marianbad.[2] In the 1949 version of that now famous essay Lacan would write that "the formation of the *I* is symbolized in dreams by a fortress, or a stadium."[3] The reflection of the self-image in the waking-dream of live sports on TV here reveals its historical origins in the first appropriation of the new medium by a fascist state. The year 1936 was also the one in which Walter Benjamin's influential essay "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" was first published. In the final note appended to that essay Benjamin commented: "In big parades and monster rallies, in sports events, and in war, all of which nowadays are captured by camera and sound recording, the masses are brought face to face with themselves."[4]

It is this conjunction of fascism, war, psychoanalysis, critical theory, and television, assembled in the historical theater provided by the 1936 Olympics, that forms the basis of the following discussion. It might be observed that while both Hitler and Lacan were in attendance at the games, Benjamin, already exiled by the Nazi state, could only note the significance of the spectacle from a distance. Such an absence on Benjamin's part will be characteristic of his relation to the various scenes around which I will orient my inquiry. Benjamin haunts us today, continuing to define our responses to the technological society whose arrival he witnessed and by whose catastrophic force he would be destroyed. His influence on postwar culture, shaping the critical sensibilities of both his friend Theodor Adorno and the generation of Marxists that emerged in the 1960s, makes him a notable case study by which to investigate the dynamics of mourning in the era of the electronic image.

The televisual syntax of freeze-frame and slow motion replay that we take so much for granted today in the live sports transmission will be taken up in my text as offering a mode of storytelling and thereby mourning--or, to use the psychoanalytic term, "working through." If the proliferation of televisual technologies--TV, video, computers--has supported, through the fetishization of mechanisms of control, what Hal Foster calls a "fascistic subject" aggressively armored against the intrusion of memory, then Benjamin has often served for the postwar imagination as an

emblem of the modern subject as displaced person, or fascism's *other*: the refugee intellectual, in Benjamin's case both Jewish and leftist. Such a figure carries on their person a body of stories, a legacy that TV wants to refuse. While TV offers us technological mastery and, in the sports game and the rock concert, the simulacrum of the urban crowd, it also delivers to us an endless series of catastrophes and the ever-ready threat of self-obliteration. In the United States, TV coverage of the Gulf War presented military operations to the domestic public as both information service and live entertainment. Nevertheless, alongside such smooth displays of expertise TV continues to send us images of devastation and homelessness: the ghosts of the global village. So TV constructs a community of viewers through the destruction of communities elsewhere. I will show how the displacement of the violence sanctioned by techno-culture onto images of homelessness has condensed in the aura that now surrounds Benjamin's posthumous image.

Replay: Death Cult

The case of Walter Benjamin appears to us in the form of a story, inviting us to identify with the plight of this endangered intellectual whose suicide calls to us through the screen of TV and total war. Here is how Peter Demetz, in his introduction to the collection Reflections, poses this story:

> For the last seven years of his life, Walter Benjamin was condemned to a way of life closely resembling that of the emigre extras in Rick's Cafe in Casablanca, but

> there was nothing fictional about his efforts to be paid a decent fee for an occasional review, to avoid the attention of the French police (who were eager to collaborate with the German authorities when it came to Jewish and leftist refugees), or to find somebody willing to help with a visa that would open the doors to England or the United States.[5]

The insertion of Benjamin into the *mise-en-scene* of Casablanca presents us with another historical conjunction of Benjamin and TV, for Casablanca is the prototypical cult movie that heralded the age of the rerun. In his essay on Casablanca, Umberto Eco posits a "Casablanca universe" [6] in which the self-consciously intertextual and ironic mode in which cinephiles began to watch Casablanca in university film clubs has become normal practice in popular culture. This semiotic universe is already evident in the films of Steven Spielberg and George Lucas and in the political image of Ronald Reagan, who was originally cast in the role of Rick in Casablanca. Casablanca is for Eco the ur-text of this televisual self-referentiality that also signals a new stage of integration between popular media, the public sphere, and everyday life--in the same way that the Paris arcades served for Benjamin as the ur-form of the emerging consumer culture of the nineteenth-century.

So Eco compares the fictional world of Casablanca to the subways of New York and Paris as sites packed with popular mythologies that have "become the catalyzers of collective memories" (254). In the first shopping arcades Benjamin traced the first appearances of the stereotypical figures of modernity--the *flaneur*, the prostitute, the ragpicker, the

conspirator--and the new forms of heroism called forth in the age of the crowd and the commodity. Paris, "capital of the nineteenth-century" as Benjamin called it, fell to the Nazi invaders in June 1940: a catastrophe that precipitated its population onto the open roads of Europe. Newsreels of this mass flight are among the first images we see in Casablanca. Benjamin was among those who fled, and while his escape ended with his suicide at the Spanish border, Hollywood would congregate its refugee population in Rick's *Cafe Americain*: capital of the twentieth-century.

As Eco moves Casablanca from cinema club into the space of the academic seminar he discovers a critical as well as a pleasurable use for the video remote control device:

> Everytime I have scanned Casablanca with very cooperative research groups, the review has taken many hours. Furthermore, when a team starts this kind of game, the instances of stopping the videotape increase proportionally with the size of the audience. Each member of the team sees something that the others have missed, and many of them start to find in the movie memories of movies made after Casablanca--evidently the normal situation for a cult movie, suggesting that perhaps the best deconstructive readings should be made of unhinged texts (or that deconstruction is simply a way of breaking up texts). (258)

The contemporary academic interest in Benjamin follows the same principle of condensation as is operative in the cult movie. For Eco, in order for a text to become a cult object it must contain a certain element of disorder that lends itself to the generation of meanings (254). Benjamin's life and work have attracted an analogous fascination, as Susan Buck-Morss explains:

> His cryptic, image-filled writings lend themselves with particular facility to post-structuralist methods of reading, where the texts, uprooted from the concrete history of their origins, appear to allow a limitless series of interpretive glosses, the choice of which depends on what is most "interesting," given the present academic climate.[7]

I will respond to Buck-Morss's comments about post-structuralism later in this introduction, but for the moment I will concentrate on the popular appeal of Benjamin and to the fascination with his life story. Benjamin's writings have given rise to a rapidly growing body of academic commentary and analysis. On the occasion of the 100th anniversary of his birth, three Anglo-American journals devoted special issues to Benjamin and a number of new scholarly studies and translations appeared in English.

Benjamin wrote so eloquently on catastrophe and history that his aphorisms have taken on an almost scriptural status in contemporary letters. The circulation of particular citations, anecdotes, and images related to Benjamin's legacy now extends beyond print culture into video.[8] The monumentality that has begun to be associated with Benjamin finds its video form in John Hughes' One Way Street,[9] which features interviews with a number of Benjamin scholars as well as activities at Benjamin's grave at Port Bou commemorating the 50th anniversary of his death. One Way Street replays the scene of Benjamin's flight over the Pyranees toward the Spanish border, clutching the black briefcase that is believed to have contained manuscripts that have since disappeared. The particular mystique surrounding

Benjamin's death--including the anonymity of his actual grave site--is already evident in narrativized accounts included in Buck-Morss's The Dialectics of Seeing and Bernd Witte's biography.[10]

Benjamin's iconography is well suited to the video medium. Another scene which, alongside that of his death, offers a haunting images of Benjamin's peculiar destiny as a modern intellectual is his encounter with the Bolshevik activist Asja Lacis. The romance surrounding Benjamin's liaison with Lacis is developed by Buck-Morss in The Dialectics of Seeing as a means of swerving away from those accounts of Benjamin that emphasize his relations with his male colleagues. "History breaks down into images" is one of the citations from Benjamin that appears on the screen in Hughes' video, which includes a dramatization of Benjamin's first meeting with Lacis played by actors as well as an interview with Lacis's actual daughter. These re-enactments also lend themselves to all the graphic possibilities of the video text--superimposition, close-up, slow-motion replay--as a kind of mourning work. It is this specific relation between mourning and televisual media that I will develop in the sections that follow. But first I will further establish Benjamin's historical relation to television.

Rerun: Walter Benjamin or Television

Benjamin's writings register with a singular sensitivity the impact of the changes experienced in his lifetime, which

included the development of the mass media of radio, cinema, and early television. Benjamin was born in 1892 into the Berlin middle-class at a time when that city had recently become the high-tech industrial center of the world: the "Electropolis." [11] In Paris, the Lumiere brothers held their first public showing of motion pictures in 1895. Benjamin began the Arcades Project in 1927, the same year as the technological realization of television.[12] The first period of experimental TV broadcasting followed immediately. Benjamin's reconstruction of the nineteenth-century was undertaken in synchrony with the arrival of what was to become the central institution of public memory. The phantasmagoria of Napoleon III's Second Empire looks to us now like the archaic form of TV's perpetual dream time. While the Nazi state was setting out to install, through television, the image of the Fuhrer in the hearts of the masses,[13] Benjamin was devising critical tropes based on analogies with cinematic montage. Both projects were put on hold by the arrival of World War II. By the time Benjamin was made available for general release in Germany in 1955, Elvis was appearing on television in America, the empire that now took the lead in electronic world domination. California, home of Hollywood and soon Silicon Valley, already supported a significant German émigré culture. It was left to Benjamin's colleagues Arnold Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno to supply a first-hand critique of American-style electronica.

There are many reasons for Benjamin's popularity in the late 60s and 70s, but to note that Benjamin's interests included student politics, radical theater and pedagogy, hashish, travel, experimental writing and film would indicate the reasons for at least some of appeal for that period. Only four years after Benjamin was first made available in English with the publication of Illuminations in 1968, John Berger provided his translation of Benjamin for TV with the BBC series Ways of Seeing. Berger's premise for his series that the invention of the camera had fundamentally transformed our relation to our cultural inheritance by distributing it for mass consumption, revised Hannah Arendt's framing of Benjamin in her introduction to Illuminations in terms of his "absolute originality" [14] that was "not for sale" (1). While Arendt helped invent a posthumous image of Benjamin that would become legendary, Berger restated Benjamin's speculations in the "Artwork" essay about the new forms of participation available in mass culture. Arendt's essay would spawn imitations, such as Susan Sontag's portrait of "The Last Intellectual," while Ways of Seeing, along with Screen magazine and the earlier Cahiers du Cinema, helped make Benjamin's "Artwork" essay a standard text of media studies.

In the marxian analysis of the media that emerged out of the political upheavals of 1968, Benjamin, along with Bertolt Brecht and Sergei Eisenstein, took on a renewed influence. French theorist Jean-Louis Comolli positioned the "*cinema*

machine" as part of an ideology of the visible in which "by journeys, explorations, colonization's, the whole world becomes visible at the same time that it becomes appropriatable"; thus "the codes of analogical figuration slip irresistibly from painting to photography and then from the latter to cinematography." [15] We can continue to follow this slippage into TV with Berger's Ways of Seeing, which demonstrates the consistencies of European oil painting and advertising inside the frame of Western imperial expansion.

But TV is now undergoing a new set of transformations: just as the work of art passed away only so that ever object could potentially shift into a secondary order of mechanical reproduction, TV points the way to the complete integration of everyday life and the electronic. Adorno and Horkheimer saw this synthetic drive in TV in which "the thinly veiled identity of all industrial culture products can come triumphantly out into the open" [16] as the parodic realization of the Wagnerian dream of unifying the arts. Now, with computer technologies, not only the arts but all information media are undergoing such a synthesis. It is in this context that the case of Walter Benjamin can help illuminate the tasks of historical mourning in a televisual mode.

Freeze-Frame: Dialectical Image

What are the practices of mourning in a culture shaped by TV? This study proposes that Benjamin's "dialectical images," taken in conjunction with psychoanalytic theories of

mourning, provide theoretical constructs translatable into the language of the televisual. The name "Tele-vision," or "vision from afar," implies the fundamental relation of this technology to questions of distance and nostalgia, recovery and loss, and implicitly to the processes of mourning. For the purposes of this study, TV will function as a metonym for a larger assemblage of electronic technologies through which the modern subject has been displaced and through which the subject attempts to recover a sense of lost self-identity.

In the Afterword to her study of the Arcades Project Buck-Morss urges her readers to take up Benjamin's methods and concerns in ways that are relevant today.[17] Buck-Morss's own shift into photographic montage in the section that follows, "Afterimages," appears as a somewhat belated gesture following her systematic presentation of the themes, concepts, and categories of Benjamin's massive research undertaking. Given that Benjamin defined his project as a combination of Marxist method with "graphicness," Buck-Morss's setting forth in this direction can be taken as an invitation to further invention.

Not an open invitation however: Buck-Morss distinguishes Benjamin's dialectical images from critical practices such as deconstruction, which she characterizes as a "hermeneutic method" that "cannot bring to a standstill what is experienced as a continuous restlessness of meaning, because there is no image of the present as the moment of revolutionary possibility to arrest thought" (339). The

series of photographs that makes up "Afterimages" offers itself as an alternative to the "novelty" (339) of deconstructive interpretation. In "Afterimages," Buck-Morss juxtaposes images from the nineteenth and early twentieth-centuries--the periods of Benjamin's historical study and of his own life experience--with images from recent American history: Pop Art, plastic toys, postmodern architecture, stockpiles of armaments, a "bag lady," Ronald Reagan, robots, and computers. Reconstructing the route through Paris taken by Benjamin during the period he worked at the Bibliotheque Nationale, Buck-Morss follows the history of *flanerie* from the days of Baudelaire into the age of the automobile and mass media: "In the United States, particularly, the format of television news programs approaches the distracted, impressionistic, physiognomic viewing of the *flaneur*, as the sights purveyed take one around the world" (345-346).

TV shares with deconstruction a certain restlessness that Buck-Morss, through her montage of still images, attempts to defamiliarize. As other cultural theorists have noted, electronic information technologies reproduce all culture in a mode of perpetual availability, potential overload, and refusal of loss that manifests the logic of capitalist production and exchange. Frederic Jameson[18] argues that the televisual--whether in its form as commercial TV or as video art--replaces the possibility of critical distance with the maintenance of an immersion in the "total flow" [19] of image-text. Comparing television to cinema, Jameson

comments: "nothing here haunts the mind or leaves its afterimages in the manner of the great moments of film" (202). So the televisual becomes for Jameson symptomatic of a postmodernism which "ceaselessly reshuffles the fragments of pre-existent texts" (223).

Jameson's and Buck-Morss's apparently similar conclusions are worth further consideration. Television, even more so than cinema, produces icons that serve to substitute for older traditions of collective memory: the assassination and funeral of J.F.K., the appearance of Elvis on The Ed Sullivan Show, the self-immolation of the Buddhist monk during the Vietnam War, the Rodney King beating, etc. But such images have gained currency not only through the shock of their initial impact--as in the cinematic examples of the Lumiere brothers' Arrival of a Train at La Ciotat, the nurse's broken spectacles in The Battleship Potemkin, the shower sequence in Psycho, etc.--but through their repeated screening and continually shifting signification (this cinema/TV distinction breaks down somewhat with the installation of the VCR as domestic appliance). Postmodern textuality is caught in the same movement of perpetual montage as TV.

What is the status of Benjamin's montage historiography in the age of video replay? A recent reading by Eduardo Cadava[20] has traced the intimate relationship of Benjamin's philosophy of history to photography: in this case, the history of invention drives the invention of a

historiography. While photographic and filmic technologies were quickly harnessed to the ideology of realism as well as used to promote totalitarianism, Benjamin took the snapshot as an analogy for an image that flashes momentarily before it's object disappears irretrievably--the antithesis of the positivistic assumption that a photograph (so long as it is "authentic") is documentary evidence of unquestionable validity. In the previously imperceptible realms of the world made visible by photography Benjamin discovered a pathos and a poetics. As Cadava shows, photography belongs in the long history of a metaphor of light and illumination that informs Western philosophy, while the other metaphor through which photography will be thought is the monument, or cemetery. Through this latter figure, photography has always been bound to the question of mourning.

According to Freudian psychoanalysis, the work of mourning allows for the gradual withdrawal of libidinal attachment to the desired object and the becoming conscious of a sense of loss. Mourning, then, would be intrinsically related to any received notions of critical consciousness, which always demand distance and separation from emotional investment and unthought ideological bias. Photography produces a new phantasmic economy that reconfigures our negotiations with the dead (so the cinema will function as a "cenotaph" [21]). Photography in Benjamin's philosophy of history deconstructs its instrumental function of reproducing the past by interrupting the flow of (commodified) time in

the form of a *momento mori*, an image of catastrophe that brings thinking to a standstill. Photography becomes the model for an encounter with history in a hieroglyphic form, a writing--in a Derridean sense--that ruptures the simulation of presence. Cadava explains:

> Only when the Medusan glance of either the historical materialist or the camera has momentarily transfixed history can history *as* history appear in its disappearance. Within this condensation of past and present, time is no longer to be understood as continuous and linear, but rather as spatial, an imagistic space that Benjamin calls a "constellation" or a "monad." (99)

Cadava shows how for Benjamin photography is always already moving away from its originary mimetic force and thereby forgetting its relation to death. The disappearance of the real haunts photography as the very condition of its possibility, but this paradoxical dimension of the photo image is easily denied--and never more so than under TV's regime of "live" action. Jameson senses in experimental video a new variation of this foreclosure:

> a ceaseless rotation of elements such that they change place at every moment, with the result that no single element can occupy the position of "interpretant" (or that of primary sign) for any length of time; but must be dislodged in turn in the following instant. (219)

How, in psychoanalytic terms, can the libido attach itself to a symbolic substitute for the lost object when it is immersed in the "total flow" of televisual information? Surely even TV/video allows for movements of investment and withdrawal, symbolic play, *fort/da*? What social practices and conventions, linguistic figures or tropes, offer the possible forms for a mourning-work in a televisual mode?

The traditional poetic form of the elegy provides a clue as to the rhythm and tempo of mourning as a symbolic process, involving "the use of repetition and refrains, the reiterated questions, the outbreak of vengeful anger and cursing, the procession of mourners, the movements from grief to consolation, and the traditional images of resurrection." [22] Buck-Morss finds perhaps an analogous process in those elements of Benjamin's writing style "most indebted to film techniques": "constructing images out of verbal fragments, the focus on detail, juxtaposing extremes, the discontinuous succession and independence of parts." [23] Montage, as the cinematographic form of allegory, was Benjamin's and others' aesthetic response to the ideological hoax of fascist culture. Taking Benjamin as exemplary producer, Buck-Morss shows how the writer can respond in situations of technological change: not by literally taking photographs or turning to film-making or script writing but by "internalizing" the new media through a kind of inventive mimicry. Benjamin provides a significant precedent and model for thinking about the points of contact and translation between our various technological media as the places where mimetic transformation and symbolic play can begin.

Video remote control has transformed the notion of montage from one of shock juxtaposition to the smooth operation of consumer choice.[24] Yet if this device supports a techno-fetishist fantasy of instantaneous gratification and mastery, it also invites the use of montage, as Benjamin once

advocated, as a principle of active (de)composition. The "total flow" of video text may effectively neutralize the power of cinematograhic montage to shock us into new conceptual recognitions, but our own fingers on the remote also offer opportunities that should not be instantly relegated. At the interface(s) of video and critical literacy we can explore a mode of writing whose figurative organization mimics the pause, freeze-frame, slow speed re-run, scan, as ways of isolating marginal detail in the surface of an image. Written narrative, or anecdote, too can be submitted to repetition and microscoping that may release new meanings through repetition. In this way televisual literacy learns from both psychoanalytic and deconstructive readings in which image and scene function as hieroglyph and condensation, principles of rhetorical organization that depart from "realist" conventions of historical exposition. In the next section I will discuss this possibility in relation to the psychoanalytic theory of the primal scene.

Flashback: The Phantom Event

The interfaces of poststructuralist notions of textuality and televisual media are multiple. Jameson refers to modernist literature "intelligently and opportunistically absorbing the techniques of film," while in the postmodern situation the theory of the text administers the shift of alphabetic literacy into its electronic forms (200). Understanding the relation of theorists like Benjamin to the

emergence of the electronic apparatus helps to orient the continued invention of critical responses to and interventions in technological change.

Cadava characterizes Benjamin's photographic method as "focusing on what has been overlooked or hidden within history, on the transitoriness of events, and on the relation between any given moment and all of history" (99). Benjamin's ambition in the Arcades Project to recover the meanings of the past through attention to the incidental details of everyday life aligns his research practice to the reconstruction of forgotten scenes in Freudian psychoanalysis. Ned Lukacher compares the theoretical status of Benjamin's dialectical images to the primal scene constructed in psychoanalysis that can never be ultimately verified by conscious memory but nevertheless can have a powerful explanatory and potentially therapeutic effect.[25]

In his famous Wolf Man case, Freud constructed a scene--in which the child witnessed his parents' coitus--as an answer to the particular dilemma posed by the patient's obsessive behaviors. The Wolf Man's dream, associated in his memory with an illustration in a book, various fairy tales, and other incidental memories generated an inter-text that provided Freud with a hermeneutic key to certain traumatic episodes in the patient's past. The primal scene was intended by Freud to effect a cure but its status remained controversial--not least for the Wolf Man himself, who could never remember whether it actually happened (137). The

lesson of this experimental reconstruction for Lukacher lies in its general relevance for contemporary issues in historiography:

> the primal scene comes to signify an ontologically undecideable intertextual event that is situated in the differential space between historical memory and imaginative construction, between archival verification and interpretive free play. (24)

In the same way that Freud investigated the origins of the Wolf Man's psychosis through a network of signifiers derived from the patient's dreams, screen memories, and fairy tales remembered from childhood, Benjamin sought to recover from the dream images embodied in commodity culture those voices that had been excluded from official histories (277). Neither the primal scene nor the dialectical image is an "image of the present," rather their possibilities lie in calling forth the non-present by way of fragmentary traces and remains.

Like Freud's notion of screen memories, TV and video histories often function as displacements of memory, representations that mask repressed traumas or social conflict. For Freud, screen memories provide apparently insubstantial details from past experience that must be decoded in order to reveal their actual psychic significance. The image gives us the "fix" that screens painful memory; at the same time the image itself becomes the key to unlocking the secrets of the past.

Marshall McLuhan[26] argued that the arrival of TV brought with it a return of the ritual processes of oral, tribal

culture; an example of which he saw in the Kennedy funeral (337). That this return was also a displacement was more accurately noted by the Frankfurt School for whom TV, as an expression of the culture industry, embodied a condition of unmourning. So TV gave us the Kennedy funeral that never stops and the assassination that has become a perpetual rerun. The Zapruder footage, which supports conspiracy theories as well as functions as an electronic monument of national remembrance, has been slowed down, fragmented, rerun an infinite number of times and scanned for the secrets that its surface promises to disclose; it presents itself as a televisual symptom of a national repetition compulsion. The televisual legacy of J.F.K. plays out at a mythic level numerous aspects of TV that a peculiarly characteristic of the medium (and its transformation and extension through videotape). While the assassination provided an historic opportunity for the "liveness" of TV to swing into high activity and maximum ideological effect through the subsequent funeral, the Zapruder footage provides a precedent for video-text in the opportunities it provokes for image decomposition. Blow-Up gave the cinematic presentation of this photographic mode of decomposition as suspense drama; the assassination generalizes the process into a mass obsession, a cryptophilia. The paradox of the televisual has become, through video, the doubling of its "liveness" by an accompanying possibility of infinite replay: no closure, no burial, memory as remote control. Returning to the Oedipal

scene--the murder of the king--assassination on TV re-invents the primal sacrificial drama theorized by Freud.

Psychoanalysis re-runs scenes from memory in order to disclose previously imperceptible perspectives that can open our sights to new destinations. Benjamin's Arcades Project was a journey back to the nineteenth-century, a form of time travel made possible by Benjamin's strayings through the streets of Paris. The Arcades Project borrowed its montage principle of (re)construction from the contemporary technology of cinema that provided a new means of simulating travel through time and space; Benjamin invented a historiographic time machine.[27] The notion in classical psychoanalysis of the primal scene as the witnessed but repressed image of the sexual act between the parents gains an extension in Benjamin's techno-analogy of the "optical unconscious." Photographic-filmic media reconstitute our collective subjecthood and our histories through the detour of an optic that displaces the limits of our natural eye. Benjamin attended to ways in which photographic close-ups exploded the confines of social spaces while slow motion, by extending movement, took control away from "father time." As the dimensions of space and time expand on the surface of the image what is revealed may also become ultimately undecideable, an enigma of visibility. The age of mechanical reproduction, which has destroyed the distance necessary to the preservation of the aura by bringing objects closer to us in their ruined form as fragmentary images, returns us to

that child-like perception (exploited by commodity display) of the world that refuses separation and lack. The photographic zoom through space-time is driven by an unconscious desire to return to a pre-Oedipal state of things, the infant's relation to the mother's body.

Helping us to understand the logic of the optical unconscious, Eisenstein's theory of montage draws on the notion of an "inner speech" that is "at the stage of image-sensual structure, not yet having attained that logical formulation with which speech clothes itself before stepping out into the open" [28]--the figure of the child or the savage suggests the power of montage to draw from the mnemonic archive of pre-logical sensuous thought.

For both Benjamin and Eisenstein the realm of sensuous images leads the way to body memory and communal ritual, the values of communal traditions that have been increasingly displaced by industrial modernization. These older, mimetic forms of behavior are given a severely reduced sphere of play in bourgeois art and the world of childhood. What results in both Benjamin's and Eisenstein's montage practice is indeed like a politicized version of Freudian psychoanalysis, directed toward awakening social memory and inspiring historical agency. The implications of this approach for academic research are far-reaching, moving beyond critical analysis toward embodied, experiential understanding. As Lukacher explains, with regard to this realm of primal images and scenes, we move beyond the conventional limits of

hermeneutics as "we are no longer concerned only with the translation of one language into another but with the most elemental translation from the prelinguistic state into language itself." [29] Mourning serves as a master trope to account for this exchange between what Jacques Lacan called the Imaginary and Symbolic orders. The storehouse of images taken from dreams and childhood memories that Freud drew from in the construction of the primal scene has its analogy today in an excavation of our electronic archive.

Close-Up: The Case of W.B.

Eisenstein gives an example of the mnemonic impact of the sensuous-imagistic order from his film The Battleship Potemkin: the prince-nez of the ship's surgeon (132). Full screen close-ups of the surgeon's spectacles appear in two scenes: the first in which they are used to magnify the maggots clinging to the ship's rotten meat; the second in which they remain hanging on the ship's ropes (ropes that might have been used, if not for the mutiny, to hang the sailors who refused to eat the soup made from the meat) after the surgeon has been cast overboard. The close-up of the spectacles is motivated by its metonymic association with the surgeon and the oppressive political order he embodies, and by the larger, apocalyptic images of the general strike and proletarian revolution. As Eisenstein explains, the mental association of part to whole participates in the logic of "primitive" thinking manifest in sympathetic magic; for

example, the association of an arrow with the wound it has caused. Such associative thinking defies any claim to an entirely "objective" realism: it is inescapably irrational and imaginative in part. Eisenstein understands filmic montage dialectically--and here he distinguishes himself from the Nazi appropriation of the same imagistic power--as the overcoming of the negation of magical-oral culture by alphabetic culture, and thereby as the socialist destruction of the era of Euro-centrism and imperialism (142).

In the case of Walter Benjamin we can begin to deconstruct the opposition between the literary-critical and the televisual by noting the strong presence of imagistic evocations in Arendt's Introduction to Illuminations (and also, by contrast, the strong didactic-analytic purpose of Berger's TV adaptation). Susan Sontag's evocation of Benjamin as the "last intellectual" was influenced by Arendt's portrayal of Benjamin as a luckless, impractical bibliophile whose relations with Marxism were "absurd." [30] Like Potemkin's surgeon, Benjamin's myopia functions emblematically.

If there is a single detail that emerges as a close-up in the scene of Benjamin's death it is the "large black briefcase" that he carried with him crossing the Pyrenees but that went missing after his death.[31] The case becomes a metonym for a possible masterplan of the Arcades Project, one of the great unfinished intellectual ventures of this century and of the barbarism that, according to Benjamin, no document

of civilization is able to completely escape. But the case also joins those countless detective novels that became the stereotypical product of the age of print: what became of Benjamin's suitcase and what did it contain? Such a mystery, open to speculation and imaginative reconstruction, belongs to the same realm where Benjamin situated his experimental method: as Lukacher comments, "in the unverifiable preontological zone between memory and imagination." [32] This zone marks the border where interpretation must declare itself as invention. Rather than attempting to reconstruct the contents of Benjamin's case, we can take up this unknown factor as a paradoxical signifier motivating a textual economy--one that translates Benjamin's story into the languages of popular media through the channels of their common cultural codes.

Benjamin's iconography has become inseparable from the narrative of Adorno's reception of Benjamin's unpublished manuscripts, his critique of the early drafts of the Arcades Project, his different roles as Benjamin's disciple, successor, and editor of his collected writings. The following discussion will remake this story by back-tracking to the earlier scene in which Benjamin entrusts Georges Bataille, just prior to the occupation of Paris, certain cases containing his manuscripts. The diegesis that supports this scene--the meetings of the College of Sociology, the archives of the Bibliotheque Nationale--becomes the organizing strategy of my own montage reconstruction.

The case of Walter Benjamin marks a trajectory as a set of historical traces; it tells the story of the destiny of an object, a collection of documents and the historical scholarship that now encases them. Benjamin's encounter with Bataille opens a space of possibility because it resists any account that would close the case by recourse to conventional historical coverage. Despite (or because of) Bataille's subsequent fame and influence on a later generation of French writers, the relationship between Benjamin and Bataille has received little attention.[33] Benjamin's legacy remains to a large degree shaped by the custody of the Frankfurt School.

Benjamin's encounter with Bataille emerges as an overlooked detail of potential significance pointing toward an "other scene" in the Benjamin story, a passage into the archive that has yet to be taken. The scene in which these figures appear together can only be reconstructed through intertextual montage, and can be verified only by scant documentation. Bataille's role in Benjamin's life appears as a trace, barely a presence. Bataille's significance is not only historical in a "realist" sense: the conjunction of the place held by poststructuralist theory with Benjamin's influence in the contemporary intellectual landscape is of great interest, even controversy--as we have already seen.

La Case Vide

Poststructuralism's attention to textual economies owes as much to Bataille's notions of expenditure as it does to

structuralist linguistics.[34] In the late 1960s, philosophers such as Jacques Derrida and Gilles Deleuze were beginning to explore the paradoxical qualities of language opened up by structuralism. The discoveries of modern linguistics, anthropology, and psychoanalysis were approached by these thinkers as the basis for an *inventio* exploiting the potentialities of semiotic *excess*. For example, Deleuze took Lacan's "Seminar on 'The Purloined Letter'" as a demonstration of two heterogeneous series (the scene in the Imperial boudoir and the scene of detection) converging in a paradoxical element (the letter), what structuralism had called the empty square (*la case vide*).[35] Heterogeneous series might consist of propositions and denotated objects, verbs and adjectives, events and intentions, etc. (37). In any of these examples language always presents the possibility of an interminable regress; for example in the case of Walter Benjamin, "case" might refer to a lost object (denotation), or to its proposed contents (proposition), or to the circumstances of its going astray (event or process of reconstructing event). In any case, its exchange across different series continues to generate meanings. Just as there are two series of displacements regarding Poe's "Purloined Letter," we could compose two divergent series around Bataille and Adorno's custody of the Arcades Project, with Benjamin's case(s) as the circulating element. Or, more divergently, we could use the case to compose an exchange between Benjamin and the televisual.

Deleuze's logic of sense resembles what Jameson sees at work in experimental video and generates an undecideability similar to that by which Lukacher defines the primal scene. How can the possibility of interminable circulation and that of "standstill"--or the respective scenes of "The Purloined Letter" and the Wolf Man--be brought together? If, in Lacan's famous formulation, "the unconscious is structured like a language," then it is precisely in terms of the continual processes of condensation and displacement that Deleuze finds his answer to this dilemma in the pre-Socratic philosophers: "where the anecdote of life and the aphorism of thought amount to one and the same thing" (128). The story of the philosopher Benjamin points to an historical scene in which the logics of circulation and catastrophe can be reconfigured. While the scene with Bataille in the Bibliotheque initiates a series of posthumous exchanges and reconstructions, the scene at Port Bou acts out the catastrophe of loss and expenditure that punctuates any linguistic system. The case of Walter Benjamin will continue to circulate between a certain excess of and a catastrophic rupture of signification, between a conservative tendency that will monumentalize his legacy and a revolutionist drive to renew his critical project.

Icon

Deleuze mentions the death of Socrates as an example of an anecdote that has taken on mythic status in the Western

intellectual tradition: to counter this status Deleuze re-poses the anecdotes that surround the Cynic philosopher Diogenes. The life and death of Benjamin are now commonly allegorized in critical commentary and the urgency of the historical moment to which he responded adds to this narrative interest.

In an interesting study of cinematic mourning, Annette Michelson recounts how Dziga Vertov's Three Songs for Lenin received a general approval in the Soviet Union that his earlier montage experiments like The Man with the Movie Camera had failed to achieve.[36] The way in which this later film of Vertov's served as a public monument makes it a telling example of the reinscription of avant-garde aesthetics in the service of apparently conservative rather than radical social forces:

> Vertov's deployment of the cinematic anomalies, of the optical panoply of slow motion, stretch printing, looping, freeze-frame, reverse motion, originally constituted as an arsenal in the assault upon the conditions and ideology of cinematic representation . . . , are now deployed as an admittedly powerful instrument in the working through, in the obsessive rehearsal of the past, in that labor of repetition, deceleration, distension, arrest, release, and fixation which characterize the work of mourning; in the infinitely varied and deeply cathected image of the founder and Liberator, the dead Father. (38)

In Three Songs for Lenin Vertov returned to forms of iconic representation deeply embedded in Russian Orthodoxies. Film was crucial in establishing the modern state's usurping the place of the sacred in popular culture. Benjamin had noticed this process during his visit to Moscow in 1926, commenting on the growing cult of Lenin's image:

> The well-known picture of the orator is the most common, yet another speaks perhaps more intensely and directly: Lenin at the table bent over a copy of Pravda. When he is thus immersed in an ephemeral newspaper, the dialectical tension of his nature appears: his gaze turned, certainly, to the horizon but the tireless care of his heart to the moment.[37]

This passage needs to be considered in its historical context as arising out of a moment of enthusiasm and optimism in Benjamin's relations with Soviet Russia; it presents a dialectical image of an explicitly revolutionist pathos. Yet while it does not attempt to extricate itself from an almost religious fascination with the photographic aura, Benjamin's citation nevertheless redirects that form of attraction by substituting for a model of phonological presence an image of immersion in textual ephemera. So Benjamin provides an example of writing dialectically with the popular icon.

Michelson suggests that the effect of the freeze-frame in Vertov's films is to restore the "flash," or shock effect, that was also central to Benjamin's theory of photography: "it inserts, within our experience of lived time, the extratemporality of death" (32). Avant-garde aesthetics need to be understood in conjuction with popular cultural forms as they both might relate to the practice of mourning: Benjamin inscribes the gesture of monumentalization in the same movement as he suggests a critique of the illusion of permanence by situating the icon in terms of the historical and the everyday. Can the same be said of the following description by Susan Sontag?

> Another picture, from 1937, shows Benjamin in the Bibliotheque Nationale in Paris. Two men, neither of whose faces can be seen, share a table some distance behind him. Benjamin sits in the right foreground, probably taking notes for the book on Baudelaire and nineteenth-century Paris he had been writing for a decade. He is consulting a volume he holds open on the table with his left-hand--his eyes can't be seen--looking, as it were, into the lower right edge of the photograph.[38]

In Sontag's image Benjamin is distinguished from those who have disappeared into the anonymity of history--those whom it was Benjamin's project to attempt to "redeem." While Benjamin's gaze is directed toward the margin of the image, his look retrieves nothing. Under Sontag's gaze this photograph becomes another emblem of melancholic scholarly immersion and Benjamin's pursuit of the arcane is seen as an undialectical descent into the past. The doubleness of every photograph that makes it appear timeless and permanent while it remains fragmentary and contingent is concealed by Sontag through the construction of a monumental *imago*: intellectual history as wish projection. Here criticism unconsciously mimics TV in its imaginary reconstructions of the past, its one-dimensional foregrounding of the face and blurring of the background, its narcissistic nostalgia as a refusal to work through real loss.

TV has assumed the iconic functions of popular culture listed by Michelson with respect to Vertov's film: "idealization of physical traits, solemnity and rhythmical repetition, the representation of the saint or martyr's life in episodes, and the view of the saint in quotidian

existence, together with friends, donors, children, worshipers, mourners, disciples" (26). Sontag's wish image of Benjamin as the "last intellectual" belongs in the realms of contemporary hagiography, but her photo-poetics--borrowed from Benjamin--point toward the ephemera that formed the basis of Benjamin's Arcades Project. As in the scene with Bataille before the fall of Paris, the Bibliotheque Nationale provides the *mise-en-scene* for the staging of Benjamin's return.

The various death cults that have become a driving force in twentieth century culture have become the object of numerous recent studies.[39] From the political sphere through commercial media, popular subcultures, and academia, the cult figure motivates both market and textual economies whose different operations do not always support or reinforce each other but often mimic each other with conflicting purposes. The multiple and competing narratives about J.F.K. or Marilyn or a host of others circulate as the televisual face(s) of history. Just as these different narratives emerge out of a range of cultural formations so are there competing critical evaluations of their value and effects. Various commentaries have celebrated the Elvis phenomenon as a populist reclaiming of history that struggles against commercial media exploitation of his image. At the other extreme, in the case of Hitler and the Holocaust, popular images have been seen to erode and subvert any sense of the actualities and moral implications of the historical events.[40] The significance of

these different examples and perspectives may also be in what they indicate about the contemporary states of cultural literacy.[41]

The re-presentation on television of various popular death cults as a way reinforcing the sense of a national constituency repeats the institutionalization of linguistic uniformity over different vernaculars during the print revolution of early modern Europe. This new language of images, however, tends to serve the interests of global corporate power over those of the nation state. Just as sacred scripture had once exerted hegemony over the multiple spirit cults of tribal orality, Elvis has been transformed from a regional cultural phenomenon--a Southern White, working-class male singing Black rhythm and blues--into an all-purpose American icon and the King of an international entertainment industry. Both historical moments, print and electronic, constructed new global markets and (re)organized massive flows of capital and information. In both cases minority experience has become attached to the semiotics of national identity or has been banished from the languages sanctioned by social or economic legitimacy.

Walter Benjamin is becoming an increasingly visible example of an academic death cult attracting the forms of attention common to other fetshized after-lives: repeated reproduction of his portrait; repetition of certain anecdotes about his life and death that imbue the past he is made to embody with a particular nostalgic value; finally, and most

commonly, repetition of certain citations from his work that now permeate cultural studies and have entered popular culture--New Wave rock groups pay their tributes to Benjamin alongside Elvis.[42] Benjamin has come to embody the projected wishes of intellectuals as a hero of both high bourgeois literacy and the revolutionist positions of the avant-garde.

Buck-Morss writes of "the world of academic cults" that has led to the mystification of Benjamin's work by cloaking itself in "intellectual jargon." [43] Gregory Ulmer sees such academic mystification as a symptom of a failure to mourn:

> The research conducted by educators--the epistemophilia of academic writing--manifests at the level of desire the search for the lost object, to make up for the separation from and loss of the mother. When mourning goes wrong in this context, the drive for research becomes a drive to hide, a cryptophilia. The very act of "coverage," as the pun suggests, may be turned to the interests of occultation in specialized discourse. What has to be hidden? The memory of pleasure, based on the experience of the archaic ego, the oral libido.[44]

The pleasures so often denied by academic discourse that are more readily available in oral cultures--storytelling that mixes memory with fantasy--are precisely those exploited by the entertainment industry. According to many theoretical studies of subculture, communities are reconstructed through reclaiming this realm of collective memory and imagination from, or through, the mass media.

As an alternative to a perceived impasse in academic responses to popular culture, Ulmer proposes writing with the "ghost-effect" (204)[45] of an allegorical mode of composition. In the spaces between memory and imagination we can begin to

listen for "other" voices that may release us from the blockages that scholarly conservation can unknowingly maintain. The return of the photographic still in the video freeze-frame initiates a mourning-work that will also proceed by citations, puns, anecdotes, and images that allow the voices of those encrypted others to speak. Ulmer begins this process with a proposition derived from the "Theses on the Philosophy of History": "I ask, after Benjamin, what image, what tableau, what scene, and also what story from history stings me into an awareness of the temporality of catastrophe?" (112). In my study the scene is one in which Walter Benjamin flees Paris in 1940, conducting a relay between the cases of manuscripts left concealed in the Bibliotheque and the catastrophe of his suicide at the border.

Catastrophe

The legendary origin of mnemotechnics is traced to Simonides' remarkable feat in recalling all of the places occupied by guests at a banquet after the roof had caved in and killed them.[46] Mnemonics has always been bound to images of catastrophe. Situating images in memory by reference to a series of *loci* (6) that function like a mental filing cabinet (12), lawyers in the classical world kept track of relevant facts in their cases. In Freudian psychoanalysis, the construction of the primal scene made available images of

castration. Writing out of our own sense of historical danger we might recover something of our repressed histories.

The popularity of Benjamin's story among intellectuals makes it analogous to a televisual recreation of the past. What Ulmer notices about academic discourses, Mary Ann Doane finds also characteristic of television: "what is now at stake in the catastrophe, for us, is *coverage*." [47] For Doane, television fulfills Benjamin's understanding of history as catastrophe; television continually awaits, responds to, and rescreens catastrophes of every form in a continual operation of technological mastery, and in doing so it presents itself also as a catastrophe: "the annihilation of memory and consequently of history" (227). Television confronts us with death as ever-ready, random, but because it is on television, distant from us. While catastrophe promises to disrupt, to overthrow "total flow," it is immediately reproduced according to the banality of everything, including the residual terror of our own death which has become meaningless.

Patricia Mellencamp, also working at the interface of Benjamin and television, points to this transformation of mourning that we have been discussing:

> The historical and *crucial* difference between Benjamin, Freud, and television is that television is shock *and* therapy; it both produces *and* discharges anxiety. Whereas for Benjamin shock came from the public "crowd" of modernity (and historical events), and for Freud the experience or affect was, with the critical exception of the war neuroses, individuated. TV administers shock and ameliorates the collective affects, imagined and

> shared, perhaps uniform. Via repetition, information, and constant coverage, TV is both source and solution.[48]

The televisual administration of mourning, according to Mellencamp, puts the "US imaginary" into a state of a perpetual adolescence "which refuses passage into the symbolic and resists aging (with the necrophiliac resuscitation and sightings of the real Elvis and the photographed nude Marilyn as rituals of this arrested process" (260).

As cultural studies examines the various processes of social identification, those fantasies about dead rock stars, screen idols, and politicians that already circulate through a variety of commercial and subcultural economies are becoming increasingly visible in the intellectual scene. We are witnessing the emergence, at the interfaces of cultural theory, electronic technologies, and everyday life, of a notion of textual production whose model is no longer the conscious individual or self-reflexive subject but the decomposing body of the celebrity. The academy has long supported its own death cult in the institutional figure of the author--national literatures and critical traditions have been founded on the tombs of Shakespeare and Goethe. In some recent studies the figures of author and celebrity converge, as in The Haunting of Sylvia Plath by Jacqueline Rose, who compares Plath's life story to a soap opera and argues that by introducing the imagery of historical catastrophe into the

domestic sphere Plath opens an imaginative space for a collective working-through of repressed memory and desire.

My study of Benjamin also works at the intersections of private and public realms as a way of participating in the logics of a televisual culture. Chapter One discusses Adorno's critique of the culture industry, which took shape in the situation of his exile in America and the aftermath of the Holocaust, and how a principal way in which Adorno's relation to this history was acted out was through his reception and publication of his friend's writings. The fate of Benjamin's manuscripts after his death gives rise to a story about his relations with Adorno and Bataille in light of their respective concerns with mourning and sacrifice. I relate Benjamin's theories to Bataille's ideas about radical expenditure undermining all forms of monumentality and place both theorists' responses to historical catastrophe in the context of TV's representations of history in the postwar era.

In Chapter Two I take up the psychoanalytic notion of scenic construction that had influenced Benjamin. Lukacher defines the Freudian primal scene as situated in an undecideable space "between archival verification and interpretive free play." My televisual allegory explores this both scholarly and imaginative space and proceeds by way of anecdotes concerning cases, boxes, hiding places, burial, cemeteries, and crypts. Exploring the psychodynamics of electronic mourning, in Chapter Three I discuss the

prototypical cult movie, Casablanca, as a fetish that re-plays the moment when it was "still possible to believe" that heroic individual acts could solve complex political situations. I read Hannah Arendt's portrayal of Benjamin for an American audience in conjunction with these popular images of heroism. In Chapter Four I examine the general transformation of our historical archive by electronic media. The inter-text that connects Benjamin with Casablanca is further developed as a way of outlining the history of TV, libraries, museums, and the Surrealist aesthetics and politics that influenced Benjamin, all of which directs me toward a mythology of the displaced person in the twentieth-century imagination.

In Chapter Five I further explore the conjunction of persons, theories, and representations at the 1936 Berlin Olympics as a primal scene of TV culture. I also look at Benjamin's attendance at Bataille's College of Sociology where the question of the cultic and the analysis of fascism was under urgent discussion. This "last stop" in Benjamin's career concludes my investigation of the death cult as a theme in Benjamin's writings and as en emergent form in TV culture. My conclusion follows the signifying chain *case-casa-blanca* to uncover behind TV's screen memories the historical experience that Benjamin perceived to be buried with the French revolutionist August *Blanqui* and which was publicly mourned in the rituals of the death cult that made Blanqui its hero. Arriving at this "forgotten" image of the

death cult, which I argue is of great significance in Benjamin's later essays, and historically coinciding with Bataille's interest in secret societies, my conclusion discusses the place of the death cult as a means by which oppressed peoples and communities negotiate a populist vision of history.

Notes

[1] I have picked up this observation from Laurence A. Rickels, The Case of California (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991) p. 110.
[2] Jacques Lacan, Ecrits: A Selection (New York: Norton, 1977) p. 239. This connection between Lacan's paper and the Berlin Olympics is developed by Hal Foster, "Postmodernism in Parallax," October 63 Winter 1993, pp. 8-9.
[3] Ecrits, p. 5.
[4] Walter Benjamin, Illuminations. Ed. Hannah Arendt. Trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken, 1969) p. 251.
[5] Peter Demetz, Introduction. Reflections: Essays, Aphorisms, Autobiographical Writings by Walter Benjamin. Trans. Edmund Jephcott (New York and London: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1978) xiii-xiv.
[6] Umberto Eco, "Casablanca: Cult Movies and Intertextual Collage," in Howard Koch, *Casablanca: Script and Legend* (New York: Overlook Press, 1992) p. 265.
[7] Susan Buck-Morss, "Walter Benjamin--Revolutionary Writer (1)," New Left Review No. 128 July-August 1981, p. 52.
[8] The most striking example that I know is Laurie Anderson's setting of the "Theses on the Philosophy of History" which appeared on the American TV program Alive from Off-Center.
[9] One Way Street. Produced and directed by John Hughes with the assistance of the Australian Film Commission.
[10] Susan Buck-Morss, The Dialectics of Seeing: Walter Benjamin and the Arcades Project (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT, 1989) pp. 331-335. Bernd Witte, Walter Benjamin: An Intellectual Biography. Trans. James Rolleston (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1991) pp. 204-205.
[11] Peter Hall and Paschal Preston, The Carrier Wave: New Informational Technology and the Geography of Innovation 1846-2003 (London: Unwin Hyman, 1988) pp. 123-145.
[12] This connection is pointed out by Jonathan Crary, "Spectacle, Attention, Counter-Memory," October 50 Fall 1989 pp. 100-103.

[13] "Spectacle," p. 105.
[14] Hannah Arendt, Introduction, Illuminations, p. 3.
[15] Jean-Louis Comolli, "Machines of the Visible," Film Theory and Criticism: Introductory Readings, eds. Gerald Mast and Marshall Cohen (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985) p. 743.
[16] Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, Dialectic of Enlightenment, trans. John Cumming (New York: Continuum, 1993) p. 124.
[17] Dialectics of Seeing, p. 340.
[18] Frederic Jameson, "Reading without Interpretation: Postmodernism and the Video-Text," The Linguistics of Writing: Arguments between Language and Literature, ed. Nigel Fabb, Derek Attridge, Alan Durant and Colin MacCabe (New York: Methuen, 1987).
[19] The term is borrowed by Jameson from Raymond Williams.
[20] Eduardo Cadava, "Words of Light: Theses on the Photography of History," Diacritics Fall-Winter 1992.
[21] see Paul Virilio, War and Cinema: The Logistics of Perception, trans. Patrick Camille (London: Verso, 1989) p. 39.
[22] Peter M. Sacks, The English Elegy: Studies in the Genre from Spenser to Yeats (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985) p. 2.
[23] Susan Buck-Morss, "Walter Benjamin-Revolutionary Writer (2)," New Left Review No. 129 September-October 1981, p. 94.
[24] This point is made by Anne Friedberg, Window Shopping: Cinema and the Postmodern (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993) p. 142.
[25] Ned Lukacher, Primal Scenes: Literature, Philosophy, Psychoanalysis (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1986).
[26] Marshall McLuhan, Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1964) p. 334.
[27] Window Shopping, pp. 91-94.
[28] Sergei Eisenstein, Film Form: Essays in Film Theory, ed. and trans. Jay Leda (San Diego, New York, London: Harvest/HBJ, 1977) p. 130.
[29] Primal Scenes, p. 99.
[30] Illuminations, p. 13.
[31] Dialectics of Seeing, p. 332.
[32] Primal Scenes, p. 280.
[33] The only attempt that I am aware of is Jeffrey Mehlman, Legacies of Anti-Semitism in France (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983) p.90. Mehlman's argument is developed in his later Walter Benjamin for Children: An Essay on His Radio Years (Chicago & London: University of Chicago Press, 1993) pp. 65-67.

[34] Because of this conjunction I cannot entirely agree with Kristin Ross's assessment that Structuralism was, in fundamental ways, complicit with French postwar modernization as a foreclosure of historical and political consciousness. Especially insofar as this assessment implies an extension of this critique to poststructuralism. That Ross does not consider in her discussion the legacies of Surrealism, in particular of Bataille (let alone any direct consideration of poststructuralism as also an important critique of structuralism), is symptomatic of her tendency to reduce intellectual and artistic movements to ideology. My use of poststructuralist methods here, while invoking both mourning and Bataille's notions of expenditure, is intended as a response to any such narrow understanding of poststructuralism. see Kristin Ross, Fast Cars, Clean Bodies: Decolonization and the Reordering of French Culture (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT, 1995).

[35] Gilles Deleuze, The Logic of Sense, trans. Mark Lester with Charles Stivale, ed. Constantin V. Boundas (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990) p. 40.

[36] Annette Michelson, "The Kinetic Icon in the Work of Mourning: Prolegomena to the Analysis of a Textual System Intertitles to Three Songs of Lenin, 1934," October 52 Spring 1990.

[37] Walter Benjamin, One Way Street and Other Writings, trans. Edmond Jephcott and Kingsley Shorter (London: Verso, 1985) p. 208.

[38] One Way Street, pp. 7-8.

[39] see for example Nina Tumarkin, Lenin Lives: The Lenin Cult in Soviet Russia (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1983); Alvin Rosenfeld, Imagining Hitler (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985); Greil Marcus, Dead Elvis: A Chronicle of a Cultural Obsession (New York: Doubleday, 1991); Jacqueline Rose, The Haunting of Sylvia Plath (London: Virago, 1992).

[40] see Alvin H. Rosenfeld, "Another Revisionism: Popular Culture and the Changing Image of the Holocaust," Bitburg in Moral and Political Perspective, ed. Geoffrey H. Hartman (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986).

[41] see R.L. Rutsky and James Wiltgen, "Marx After Elvis," Strategies No. 6 1991, who propose: "politics could become, like Elvis, a set of contested, overlapping identifications, ranged around some immaterial object that will never be *completely* embodied, represented" (15).

[42] I have in mind two examples: the English collective Henry Cow's Unrest album includes instrumental tracks entitled "Ruins" and "Arcades"; and New Wave group The Mekons have recorded several "Benjaminian" songs, notably "The Sorcerer" on The Curse of the Mekons, which includes a "rap" sampling of "The These on the Philosophy of History" and "Ice Rink in

Berlin on Retreat from Memphis which is bases in an anecdote from "Berlin Chronicle."

[43] Dialectics of Seeing, xi.

[44] Gregory Ulmer, Teletheory: Grammatology in the Age of Video (New York: Routledge, 1989) p. 182.

[45] Ulmer borrows this phrase from Jacques Derrida, Foreword, The Wolf Man's Magic Word: A Cryptonymy, by Nicholas Abraham and Maria Torok, trans. Nicholas Rand (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986).

[46] Frances Yates, The Art of Memory (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1966) pp. 1-2.

[47] Mary Ann Doane, "Information, Crisis, Catastrophe," Logics of Television: Essays in Cultural Criticism, ed. Patricia Mellencamp (Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1990) p. 230.

[48] Patricia Mellencamp, "TV Time and Catastrophe, or *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* of Television," Logics of Television, p. 246.

CHAPTER 1
THE CASE OF WALTER BENJAMIN

> Literary theory, and especially theory of narrative, a rather barren area of endeavor constantly threatened by the tedium of its techniques as well as by the magnitude of the issues, offers poor soil for the heroes and the hero-worship that it rather desperately needs. So when a possible candidate for such a status comes along, he is likely to be very well received, especially if he is safely and posthumously out of reach. Such belated "receptions," for being rare, are all the more intense in the field of literary theory. A fairly recent example is, of course, the case of Walter Benjamin.[1]

The aesthetic doctrine of high modernism which evoked the archaic origins of lyric voice--"to give a sense more pure to the words of the tribe"(Mallarme)--just as it felt the power of that voice disappearing before the advance of industrialism and urbanism, has left traces in even the most apparently progressive of cultural criticism. In the same way that the masked figures who participated in ancient rites were understood to communicate with the world of the dead, the figure of the author still gives rise to academic cults that organize and define the limits of the dissemination of knowledge: the authorial voice that is supported by the monumental installation of a name, image, life story, remains a primary source by which we negotiate our relations with the past. What happens, however, when this death cult that has taken a specific form in an era of print and book literacy is displaced by the new technologies that now transmit image,

voice and word? According to the most influential of media analysts, the various modes of electronic information have given rise to an epochal mutation of our culturally mediated encounters with death. Have the implications of these changes for the academic study of our culture in the "age of television" yet been fully understood?

The "age of criticism" has presented--especially in the United States--a new variation on literary celebrity with the emergence of the theorist. The academic reception of French Structuralism on one hand, and the popular fame of Jean-Paul Sartre on the other, opened the doors for the marketing of poststructuralism. Intellectual stars are nothing new but, as Paul de Man notes in the passage cited above, they have been rare in the realm of literary studies. De Man's response to hero worship as it arises in an academic field of study is ironic: such projections may help to popularize a discipline but their effects always remain to be unmasked by critical hermeneutics. Yet de Man himself became subject posthumously to a scandal that continues to de-fame the circulation of his name and his writings. Close readings, by Derrida and others, of the de Man text, which now includes his wartime journalism for collaborationist newspapers, have not been entirely successful in dispelling the suspicion with which de Man's legacy is now approached. Eric Santner, in his discussion of this controversy, has commented on de Man's "error" insofar as

> he sought to *displace* and *disperse* the particular, historical tasks of mourning, which for him, as is now

> known, were substantial and complex, with what might be called structural mourning, that is, mourning for those "catastrophes" that are inseparable from being-in-language.[2]

For Santner, poststructuralist theory often commits the error of denying the importance of those social contexts that support any attempt to come to terms with the past. He gives de Man's reading of Benjamin's "Task of the Translator," as his example of this tendency: "Benjamin's . . . language of historical pathos, language of the messianic, the pathos of exile and so and so forth, really describes linguistic events which are by no means human." [3] This citation chosen by Santner (taken from an oral response by de Man to a question at a public lecture) is certainly provocative. De Man's attempt to shift focus from the pathetic-human into the linguistic-inhuman is as complex a move as his own rigorous critical method would demand. In approaching the many theoretical issues it raises, I want first to simply note how this gesture assumes a distance from that pathos that no doubt also supports the "hero-worship" so prevalent in the case of Walter Benjamin.

The linguistic mode of textual analysis that de Man practiced with such sophistication developed out of the "scientific" advances of both European Structuralism and American New Criticism that had attempted to separate their practice from the moralizing and psychologizing tendencies of popular, or "amateur," styles of literary commentary. The journalistic circulation of information via the attractions of celebrity and scandal was an anathema to the new

professional ethos of the postwar American academic. Yet de Man's legacy has become contaminated by the logic of this other mode of information in a way that can no longer be dismissed with a polite--or polemical--irony. In fact the scandals that have become associated with the names of "deconstruction," "de Man," and "Heidegger," have become a center point of contemporary critical discussion and debate. While many intellectuals of de Man's generation articulated their positions in opposition to the kind of political engagement proposed and practiced by Sartre, the "media event" has returned to haunt their public image.

The logics of popularity and notoriety should not be dismissed if we wish to understand the political landscape in which any intellectual endeavor takes shape. Critical theory has always faced on one hand a philosophical and literary inheritance, and on the other commodity fetishism, the Society of the Spectacle, the "precession of simulacra," etc. In Santner's discussion, the case of de Man is compared to instances of public mourning on television: theory "mourns" by deconstructing the central philosophemes of the Western tradition as they are implicated in the ideologies of nationalism and totalitarianism, while TV mourns the War and the Holocaust by nostalgic simulation of a missing community. Following Santner's argument, any critique of mass culture would be inadequate if it did not take serious consideration of actual--if inadequate--social practices of commemoration.

Within this mournful landscape both theory and TV present themselves in the wake of global catastrophe. Both the academic and entertainment industry support sacrificial economies, both attempt to contain or deny the trauma of catastrophic shock. Benjamin's death has become emblematic--the "Last Intellectual"--of the literary and artistic culture extinguished by the outbreak of World War II, and in this it both points toward and escapes a more general annihilation; Jeffrey Mehlman goes so far as to comment, with reference to Benjamin's death: "There is a sense . . . in which to have died before the genocide is tantamount, in this last half of the twentieth century, to having retained a certain innocence, even childhood." [4]

Benjamin returned for the TV generation--to use de Man's phrase, "safely and posthumously out of reach"--without himself having to confront the burdens of writing "after Auschwitz." Benjamin offers the consolation of nostalgia for a culture of avant-garde experimentation, high literacy, and cosmopolitanism. Yet cultural studies has explained the iconic as always a contested site, of a hegemony that can be achieved only by overcoming a multiplicity of competing narratives. In a mediascape haunted by dead movie and rock stars, politicians and revolutionaries, Benjamin appears as a high-profile example of an academic death cult.

case (Fr.) -- 1. hut, cabin
2. compartment; pigeonhole

caser (Fr.) -- to put away; to file (papers)

Benjamin wrote about objects with the passion of the collector, exploring "a relationship to objects which does not emphasize their functional, utilitarian value--that is, their usefulness--but studies and loves them as the scene, the stage, of their fate." [5] Benjamin was aware that objects as well as persons have their fate, and we know that his destiny became bound to that of his life-consuming research undertaking, the Arcades Project that kept him working in Paris right up to the Nazi invasion.

Benjamin's legacy came into the hands of Theodor Adorno, following his period of exile in California and his critique of the American culture industry. The Frankfurt edition of Benjamin later came under public attack by German Marxists who saw in it a continuation of a "scandalous" censorship of Benjamin by the Institute of Social Research in the 1930s. Brecht, as a figure who had engaged directly with both communism and mass media became the ally of Benjamin now called upon to correct the Frankfurt reconstruction. A return to the avant-garde experiments of the 20s and 30s became one of the battle cries in the upheavals of the late 60s.

Critical evaluation of Benjamin's achievement has given rise to various territorial battles that, for example, privilege the theological dimension of his thought as opposed to the political, or vice versa. The history of Benjamin's posthumous publication unfolds as a drama of custody and accusation in which Scholem and Adorno have become his

guardians protecting and defending him against the influence of Brecht and Lacis; such personal rivalries are extended on broader fronts in which a later generation of critics continue the polemics begun by their mentors and teachers.

Noting the shifting custody of Benjamin's corpus we can speculate on the greater destiny of critical theory. On fleeing Paris Benjamin entrusted a large part of the Arcades Project to Georges Bataille, who hid it in the Bibliotheque Nationale. Adorno received these manuscripts in 1948 [6] and the second life of Walter Benjamin went public with the appearance of the first collection of his writings in German, edited by Adorno, in 1955. By now it has perhaps become an accepted part of Benjamin's legend that, as Richard Wolin has put it, "Adorno . . . was singularly responsible for having rescued Benjamin's work from a state of total oblivion" [7] -- Wolin's choice of phrase, an evocation of allegory as redemption, is a clear signal of Adorno's privileged status[8] as the custodian of Benjamin's works. Although Benjamin had left an official will leaving all his manuscripts to Scholem, Adorno had already been influenced by Benjamin enough to have taught the *Trauerspiel* book at Frankfurt as early as 1932. [9] The first German edition of Das Passagen-Werk, edited by Adorno's former student Rolf Tiedemann, was not published until 1982.

In the narrative of this inheritance, with its rites of academic filiation, we note the forgetting of Bataille as a significant actor. If Adorno now stands as high priest of

the Benjamin cult he also acted as a friend who attempted to put Benjamin, along with the notion of the "life's work" (3), to rest--a gesture which can be distinguished from later Anglo-American reconstructions that will raise Benjamin up in the form of a nostalgic stereotype evoking a lost intellectual culture. The repetition of the ritualized gesture that makes of Benjamin a "personality" echoes the symptomatic aridity of the culture industry that Adorno diagnosed as masking an unmourned loss. Adorno's presentation of Benjamin was in terms of the negative dialectic:

> what motivates the decision to publish an *oeuvre*--which its author would have preferred buried in "marble vaults" and exhumed on a better day--is a promise that emanated from Benjamin the writer and the person, a promise that it becomes all the more urgent to recollect now that the overwhelming powers of the status quo have clearly sworn never again to permit anything comparable to Benjamin's unique fascination to recur.[10]

Benjamin, embodying critical consciousness, was irretrievably lost but thereby returned with even greater urgency. Benjamin continues to haunt us because he remains out of reach: where, if anywhere, does he belong? In The Dialectics of Seeing, Susan Buck-Morss emphasizes Benjamin's liaison with Asja Lacis in an attempt to counter the dominant presences of Scholem, Adorno, and Brecht in existing accounts,[11] among which she includes her own earlier study The Origin of Negative Dialectics(377), which attended to Benjamin's relation to Adorno and the Frankfurt School. Of Adorno's mourning for Benjamin, Buck-Morss writes:

> The intensity with which Adorno viewed this loss of one individual could not be matched by sheer numbers of victims. The war, the horrors committed against Jews in Germany, the loneliness of emigration, combined with dissipation of potential for revolution, were all expressed in Benjamin's gesture of suicide. As the literal acting out of the "liquidation of the individual," it was a tragic allegory of the contradictions inherent in the historical present.[12]

In response to this sense of overwhelming loss, Buck-Morss sees Adorno attempting to mourn, as his work takes on "the character of a philosophical requiem" (170), while Benjamin's "brilliantly eccentric mind haunts even the most empirical, social-scientific writing of Adorno's later years" (xiv):

> More strongly than ever, Adorno internalized Benjamin's philosophy as an act of *Aufhebung*, in all three senses (preserving, negating, going beyond) of this Hegelian term. It meant that he preserved his friend's work in his own so that nothing he wrote was untouched by Benjamin's personal language and unique epistemological method. But it also meant that he redeemed by means of this method the very problems in Benjamin's work which he had criticized in their correspondence. (170)

The way in which Buck-Morss understands Adorno's mourning-work invites the distinction, made by psychoanalysts Nicolas Abraham and Maria Torok, between the terms *introjection* and *incorporation*. Jacques Derrida has called upon this distinction to challenge the metaphysics of the Hegelian *Aufhebung*. While the classical psychoanalytic notion of introjection implies a going beyond the object--a taking-in and letting-go--incorporation returns us to a remainder that has never been mourned but instead preserved in an inner crypt from which it continues to "speak" through the unknowing subject. In the case of Adorno's sublation of Benjamin, the theory of incorporation would alert us to those

"other" voices in the Adorno-Benjamin text that have not been accounted for by Adorno's deliberate labor of reinscription and presentation. "Bataille" could serve as the name for a scene hiding behind a battle for possession of what remains of Walter Benjamin. Such an encrypting of an unmourned loss can be transmitted across generations as an un-worked-through conflict appearing as critical polemic.[13]

The cases of documents that Benjamin entrusted to Bataille also contained the painting by Paul Klee, "Angelus Novus," that Benjamin evoked as his emblem of history as catastrophe in his "Theses on the Philosophy of History." In the seventh thesis Benjamin wrote that just as no "document is free of barbarism, barbarism also taints the manner in which it was transmitted from one owner to another." [14] The Arcades Project carries with it the legacy of Nazism that made even the survivors complicit in the merciless killing of others. Bataille could not save Benjamin, but hid his documents. Adorno was to respond to the catastrophe by describing all culture after Auschwitz as "garbage."

Benjamin scholarship provides a high profile example of an academic death cult--remembering Freud's explanation in Totem and Taboo that mourning and sacrifice are always haunted by ambivalence toward the dead.[15] Adorno and Horkheimer's call for a "theory of ghosts" to attend to the aberrations of mourning in contemporary culture itself draws attention to the repressed hostility that underlies the establishment of Benjamin as monument: "Only the conscious

horror of destruction creates the correct relationship with the dead: unity with them because we, like them, are the victims of the same disappointed hope." [16] The failure to mourn is symptomatic for Adorno and Horkheimer of the devaluation of experience under market capitalism. Because the past has become worthless as a form of social exchange, a sense of historical continuity disappears and the value of the now is distinguished only against the ever-ready threat of meaningless destruction. On the other hand, the past can be monumentalized as a narcissistic fantasy that also refuses confrontation with loss. Ignorance and falsification are the perils of a process of reconstruction that harbors an angry and vengeful relation to the dead.

On his return to Frankfurt, Adorno wrote to Leo Lowenthal that "it is as if the spirit of the murdered Jewish intellectuals had descended into the German students." [17] While Adorno conducted his seminar as medium, ambivalence would come back to haunt him before his own death in the cultural politics of the 1960s, in the shape of a radicalism he had helped foster through his teaching and his public role as cultural critic.

But a new generation of Marxists' return to Benjamin and Brecht repeated the forgetting of critical theory's debt to Bataille, who had meanwhile become a major precursor figure for French post-structuralism. Bataille took Freud's notions of repression and ambivalence toward closer encounters with the intensities of attraction and repulsion: behind the taboo

on the sacred body of the father/king was a real putrefaction that threatened to annihilate the separation of the subject but at the same time transmitted a force "analogous to the production of an electric current uniting, in a more or less stable manner, individuals who come into contact almost by chance." [18] The installation of the Benjamin monument touches on our fascination with and terror of (both well catered to by television) the abject bodies emblematized in the Holocaust: the image of devastation that accompanies a more general annihilation of tradition. The cult of the author was attacked by Bataille with reference to the case of de Sade, the behavior of whose admirers Bataille commented : "resembles that of primitive subjects in relation to their king, whom they adore and loathe, and whom they cover with honors and narrowly confine." [19]

While the Frankfurt School came to see the age of television as one of "repressive desublimation" (Marcuse), Bataille's program of radical desublimation and anti-Oedipal regression poses an*other* politics--to be distinguished from Brecht's project of popular didacticism--that pertains to the case of Benjamin. Television can be said to offer a parody of Bataille's community regenerated through an electrifying force; nevertheless television, with its own elaborate cult of the dead, now occupies the place of the sacred.

etui (Fr.) -- case, box

The destructive character is the enemy of the *etui*-man. The *etui*-man looks for comfort, and the case is its

> quintessence. The inside of the case is the velvet-lined track that he has imprinted on the world. The destructive character obliterates even the traces of destruction.[20]

The modernist revolution in the arts was characterized by a generational shift in which the sons and daughters of the European middle-class broke away from the ornate finery and stuffy, cramped interiors that had encased the world of their parents and invented a lighter, starker (photographic) style.[21] Adorno and Horkheimer were among those who survived Benjamin to see the liquidation of critical consciousness (based in familial privacy) as a part of the direction of modernization towards the ends of fascist and technocratic domination: this also had become part of the "clean up." The various "destructive" projects of the avant-garde often thrived parasitically off the debris of the earlier cultural formation: what Benjamin shared with the French Surrealists was a fascination with the ruins of bourgeois culture, the decaying commodity forms that the march of progress had already stepped over and left for dead.

The avant-garde had aligned themselves, in a situation of massive social upheavals, with political movements that would help clear the way for the emergence of totalitarian states. In the after-shock of the ensuing global catastrophe, the (Western) inheritors of classical bourgeois culture would come to look with nostalgia at the earlier *belle epoch* in a very different way than Benjamin had looked back at his childhood among the Berlin middle-class.

When Brecht encountered Adorno during their common period of exile in California he toyed with the idea of writing a novel based on the story of the Frankfurt School: "A wealthy old man dies, disturbed by the suffering in the world. He leaves in his will a large sum of money establishing an institute to search for the source of misery--which is of course himself." [22] In Brecht's view it is the inheritance itself which remains the problem, and in this spirit "he invented the word 'Tui,' the abbreviation of 'tellect-ual-in,' to refer to inside-out (or upside-down) intellectuals" (167). What remained of the old world after the war and the Holocaust drew different responses from the survivors, but they shared a deep ambivalence about the past.

Benjamin entrusts the Arcades Project to Bataille: as we consider this marginal detail in the story of Benjamin's posthumous legacy, we might pause to note, after Denis Hollier,[23] that Bataille began his career in the Bibliotheque as a numismatist. Numismatics, Hollier explains, is the science of coins that have no exchange value outside the domains of scholarly research. The numismatist is interested in things only insofar as they are useless, and in this he resembles Benjamin's figure of the allegorist whose melancholy gaze drains all life from its object. Later Bataille's journal Documents tried to rescue the ethnographic object from the hegemony of the art work (5) by restoring its original use value (7). In order to contest the tendency of the museum--participating in the logic of commodity

fetishism--to aestheticize everything, contributors to Documents called upon multi-media (photo and phonographic) to recontextualize the exhibit by evoking the ghost body of the absent user (9).

Bataille's passage from conservative archivist to experimental montagist parallels Benjamin's transition from his study of the Baroque emblem to his alliance with Brecht: in both cases the interests of arcane scholarship are turned toward the politics of representation and cultural production in the new media apparatus. As Hollier points out, this common direction taken by Benjamin and Bataille also leads them back to the ritual and cultic practices that determine original use value: the rejection of instrumentalist returns them to the question of the sacred. Use value is ultimately beyond the useful (12).

Bataille attempted to push the rejection of commodity exchange to the point of no return, toward a base materialism where pure expenditure annihilated both subject and object leaving nothing behind: "not a ghost, not an heir, not a double" (23)--as Hollier puts it, pointing to the contradictions inherent in re-publishing Documents. And the Arcades Project? Evidently Bataille *did nothing* with Benjamin's documents except hold onto them for safekeeping; and yet, with the "resurrection" of both authors, even this non-action assumes a potential significance as it takes on an exchange value in the current scholarly market place: it was always "too late" for Bataille's radical gesture.

While Benjamin's encounter with Bataille readily opens itself to speculation and offers itself to the construction of a comparative study of the two writers, I do not propose to provide a Bataillan study of Benjamin to be placed alongside the existing Frankfurt, Brechtian, Scholomian, etc., readings. The scene in which Bataille receives Benjamin's manuscripts for safekeeping acts out, in a way that is historically embodied, the role that the archive plays in absorbing the shock of rapid social and cultural change. At the same time, Bataille's role calls attention to his philosophical response to legitimation through ritual and monumental symbolization: violent and ecstatic *desublimation*.

The scene with Bataille retains the character of a speculation--perhaps even an hallucination--in which Bataille appears as a paradoxical figure, acting a strange part. In Bataille's notions of expenditure the (structuralist) logic of symbolic exchange is ruptured; it resists any practice of mourning that would recuperate loss through monumentalization. In Bataille's imagined community without a scapegoat, we find an affirmation of catastrophic loss which is the antithesis of the sacrificial economies of both TV and the academy.

Bataille and the "surrealist ethnographers" disrupted the usual order of museum display in attempt to restore the original use value of the object in its displaced context--would an equivalent project to call forth the ghost of Walter Benjamin through electronic simulation of his presence

(using, if they exist, surviving recordings of his radio broadcasts of the 30s)? Bataille's response to this kind of approach was to refuse reconstruction in all its forms, including the installation of author as monument. Bataille's assault on the instrumental is not easy to forget.

The industrial reproduction of the image made possible by photographic technologies supports the market function of fame. The celebrity, who embodies the promise of consumption, is consumed through a seemingly infinite proliferation of products imbued with the supposed magical quality of the personality that promotes them. The conversion from an advertised Paradise to an actual Hell of interminable repetition is a continuation of the mythic patterns that Benjamin perceived as the "phantasmagoria" of modernity that accumulated in 19th century Paris. Continuing the critical analysis of mass culture in post-war America, Adorno and Horkheimer saw an infernal dimension in animated cartoons in which "the protagonist becomes the worthless object of general violence" so that "the audience can learn to take their own punishment." [24] In the contemporary capitalist economy the celebrity replaces the sacrificial hero in a refusal of pure expenditure that maintains the sacrifice in a perpetual state of living death and reproduces all of its consumers as the real victims. This mutation of the sacred into Fun becomes another version of a general mania of what Adorno and Horkheimer call the "jovial denial" (141), "that false identity of society and individual, whose

terror still shows for a moment in the empty semblance of the tragic" (154).

Benjamin's Arcades Project is one of the most significant modern successors to the memory theaters described by Francis Yates in The Art of Memory: while the memory theaters of the ancients fixed the dead in the Symbolic *loci* that would readily convert to a medieval Hell, modernity sees the return of the dead in the new media as disembodied and always displaced voices and images. The replacement of the individual life history by the commodified image produces an unmournable loss unless collective memory can become symbolized through participation in the image repertoire of the culture.

Such a project was called for by John Berger in Ways of Seeing. Paying homage to Benjamin, Berger argues: "For the first time ever, images of art have become ephemeral, ubiquitous, insubstantial, available, valueless, free. They surround us in the same way as a language surrounds us. They have entered the mainstream of life . . ." [25] In the print version of the TV series, a photograph of Benjamin (34) is reproduced alongside the masterpieces and anonymous productions of the era of European oil painting, the sexualized models and commodities of contemporary advertising, the occasional documentary photograph from the news media, and sometimes an early photograph or illustration of historical interest--Benjamin emerges, as icon, into the image repertoire of television culture and thereby becomes

potentially available to be re-cited and re-motivated by the everyday receiver: Benjamin as information to be "sampled." Despite the Frankfurt School's attack on the meaninglessness produced by the culture industry, Berger--citing the "Artwork" essay--celebrates the radical, but usually prohibited, possibilities of the electronic age. For Ulmer, Berger touches the foundations of academic property and power: "The melancholy of mourning arises precisely in relation to this violation of the monumental, the monuments whose function it is to hold together the nation of scholars." [26]

The process initiated by Berger in the name of Benjamin gives a different face to Benjamin's legacy by insisting on the continuing currency of the Marxist populist positions of the 20s and 30s. The political importance of image control is represented by the modern cult of the leader and the drama of violent revolution that can suddenly seize upon and redirect mass ideological formations. Adorno and Horkheimer's claim that "the metaphysical charisma of the Furher invented by the sociology of religion has finally turned out to be no more than the omnipresence of his speeches on the radio, which are a demoniacal parody of the omnipotence of the divine spirit" [27] can be aligned to McLuhan's theory that the emergence of the radio medium in Germany in the 30s "evoked archaic tribal ghosts," [28] stirring unconscious impulses that supported the Nazi movement. For Adorno and Horkheimer, who had fled the Nazi state, the

American entertainment industry continued the fascist discovery of the new media by other means. Paul Virilio explains the emergence of a "ghost industry" out of the twin phenomena of electronic technology and spiritualism in the nineteenth century. Fantasies of photographic images as media connecting the living to the world "beyond" informed the development of the cinematic apparatus--a process particularly evident in the "haunted screen" (Eisner) of the post-war German cinema of the 1920s.[29] McLuhan argued that it was television rather than radio that was the medium for the return of the tribal in post-war America, while noting: "The power of radio to retribalize mankind, its almost instant reversal of individualism to collectivism, fascist or Marxist, has gone unnoticed" (304).

In order to ask what is at stake in Benjamin's encounter with Bataille I want to return briefly to Santner's discussion of de Man. Santner's conclusions about de Man's "error" are summarized by him in an aphorism: "Mourning without solidarity is the beginning of madness." [30] For Santner, the social solidarity necessary for "successful" (23) mourning depends on an empathetic environment (24); de Man's failure to mourn relates to his specialized discourse which, through a kind of analytic excess, moves toward a denial of human suffering. But what would be de Man's response to this accusation of madness?

> That there is a nonhuman aspect of language is a perennial awareness from which we cannot escape, because language does things which are so radically out of our general control that they cannot be assimilated to the

> human at all, against which one fights constantly. So, I don't think that--the humanistic perspective is obviously there, there is no question that it has to be there--it is from the moment that a certain kind of critical examination--and that examination *has to* take place, it has to take place not out of some hubris of critical thought or anything of the sort, it has to take place because it addresses the question of what actually happens.[31]

De Man reads a deconstructive logic at work in Benjamin's text whereby the humanistic pathos of his rhetoric is displaced by another logic "best analyzed in terms of the inhuman, dehumanized language of linguistics" (96); and he adds "You can call that divine or sacred, if you want, but it is not mysterious in that sense, I think, though it is paradoxical in the extreme . . . " (97).

De Man's attention to the paradoxical, "inhuman" dimension of language puts him out of the reach, in Santner's view, of an empathetic community. Can there be no solidarity in this madness? Bataille, during this period in which his own intellectual community permitted the attendance of Benjamin, offered this formulation of the sacred: "only a privileged moment of communal unity, a moment of the convulsive communication of what is ordinarily stifled." [32] Bataille's evocation of the sacred recalls the "convulsive" beauty praised by the Surrealists that had also influenced Benjamin's theory of the dialectical image. Sounding similar to Benjamin's thesis that "the true picture of the past flits by," [33] Bataille also has the following to say about the sacred:

> The term *privileged instant* is the only one that, with a certain amount of accuracy, accounts for what can be encountered *at random* in the search; the opposite of a *substance* that withstands the test of time, it is something that flees as soon as it is seen and cannot be grasped.[34]

Benjamin and Bataille share something in their mode of approaching the paradoxical, the inhuman, that nevertheless presents itself as a call for a revolutionary solidarity; whether this paradox is best left to linguistic analysis is another question. Benjamin and Bataille encounter eachother at a moment of avant-garde experimentation that faces annihilation at the hands of the fascists--in this their encounter offers us an alternative image of solidarity to that required for acts of mourning total war or the Holocaust. Nevertheless: "the tradition of the oppressed teaches us that the 'state of emergency' in which we live is not the exception but the rule" [35] --in this sense, Benjamin's encounter with Bataille offers us a true picture of the past and an iconographic response to the problem of critical theory's public face, although one in which solidarity remains "paradoxical in the extreme . . . "

Notes

[1] Paul de Man, The Resistance to Theory (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986) p. 106.
[2] Eric L. Santner, Stranded Objects: Mourning, Memory, and Film in Postwar Germany (Ithaca & London: Cornell University Press, 1990) p. 29.
[3] Resistance to Theory, p. 96.
[4] Walter Benjamin for Children, p. 91.
[5] Illuminations, p. 60.
[6] Dialectics of Seeing, p. 73.

[7] Richard Wolin, Walter Benjamin: An Aesthetic of Redemption (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982) pp. 275-276.
[8] Wolin's opinion here echoes that of Buck-Morss in Origin of Negative Dialectics: Theodor W. Adorno, Walter Benjamin and the Frankfurt Institute (New York: Free Press, 1977) p. 170.
[9] Gershom Scholem, Walter Benjamin: The Story of a Friendship, trans. Harry Zohn (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1981) pp. 187,191.
[10] Gary Smith (ed.), On Walter Benjamin: Critical Essays and Recollections (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1991) p. 3.
[11] Dialectics of Seeing, p. 6.
[12] Origin of Negative Dialectics, p. 165.
[13] In light of this theory, what can we make of the following assertions by Leo Lowenthal in Martin Jay (ed.), An Unmastered Past: The Autobiographical Reflections of Leo Lowenthal (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987):

> Now that the edition of Benjamin's collected works is completed, the publishing house and the group responsible for it can collectively regard themselves as the writers of Benjamin's history. It will remain a concern to all of us, especially the younger generation, to defend from the enemy his gift to us (and Benjamin never made that easy for us--which is a gift as well). The enemy comes in many guises, such as the paltry accusation that the appearance of a class-type edition is a burial ceremony that puts Benjamin firmly and finally into his coffin--and we all know that, particularly in Germany, although a classic may mean hours of nostalgic leisure-reading, it also means ritual quoting and being forgotten. Yet the philosopher of a negative theology, the architect of history as ruins in temporal and atemporal space, the thinker of the contradiction (whether intentionally or not, he himself is not free of contradictions), the traveler on Hegel's path of positive negation, is entirely safe from the fate of a German classic. This fate cannot touch Benjamin, and indeed, he has already survived the enemy. (233-234)

[14] Illuminations, p. 258.
[15] Sigmund Freud, Totem and Taboo, trans. James Strachey (New York: Norton, 1950) p. 61.
[16] Dialectic of Enlightenment, p. 215.
[17] An Unmastered Past, p. 213.
[18] Denis Hollier (ed.), College of Sociology 1937-39, trans. Betsy Wing. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988) p. 109.
[19] Georges Bataille, Visions of Excess: Selected Writings, 1927-1939, trans. Allan Stoekl with Carl R. Lovitt & Donald M. Leslie (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1985) p. 92.

[20] One Way Street, p. 158.
[21] see Dialectics of Seeing, pp. 293-303.
[22] This plot was suggested to Brecht by Hans Eisler, cited in Origin of Negative Dialectics, p. 167.
[23] Denis Hollier, "The Use Value of the Impossible," October 60 Spring 1992, p. 3.
[24] Dialectic of Enlightenment, p. 138.
[25] John Berger, Ways of Seeing (London: Penguin, 1972) p. 32.
[26] Teletheory, p. 12.
[27] Dialectic of Enlightenment, p. 159.
[28] Understanding Media, p. 301.
[29] War and Cinema, pp. 28-30.
[30] Stranded Objects, p. 26.
[31] Resistance to Theory, p. 101.
[32] Visions of Excess, p. 242.
[33] Illuminations, p. 255.
[34] Visions of Excess, p. 241.
[35] Illuminations, p. 257.

CHAPTER 2
UNPACKING MY LIBRARY

With its promise of total flow never fulfilled but instead continually interrupted, commercial television--"the tube"--has been distinguished from cinema's construction of the viewing subject. TV induces regression to a pre-Imaginary state of dependency.[1] The behavior of the TV viewer becomes addictive, always returning in pursuit of a satisfaction that will continue to be frustrated. Total flow, as Jameson notes, does not offer meaning as much as the activity of signification. Watching TV, the ego, as agent of critical consciousness, is never able to effectively constitute itself. The master of the house, his fingers on the remote control, may attempt to repress panic and "choose" to simulate mastery, but TV's actual compensation for deconstructing self-presence is the endless pleasure of *distraction*. We turn to face the judgment of the (alphabet-induced) superego when the machine stops turning us on. The fragmented and multiplied subject produced by TV has therefor been defined as "feminine." [2]

TV ceaselessly screens the catastrophe that must never arrive, and thereby covers the void at the foundation of all subjectivity. With TV on we panic at the perpetual threat of on one side castration--the symbolic confrontation with death

and the labor of mourning--and on the other the existential abyss of the prelinguistic (although always as a retroactive effect). If mourning promises the rewards of critical awareness and historical agency then the descent into the pre-Symbolic, the (M)Other, also opens a space of transgressive pleasure. These two directions might be sign-posted, for the purposes of my discussion, Adorno and Bataille. TV withholds both possibilities, while Benjamin conducts a relay between the two.

Jean-Luc Godard explains, using the example of Hitchcock's Vertigo, that if one walked in to a room at 10 am and unexpectedly was confronted with the video image of a woman walking down the street one wouldn't necessarily recognize her as Kim Novak--she might be "a housewife going to pick up her kids at school, or a secretary taking a memo from her boss, or something like that. You would say, 'No, its Kim Novak,' and this comes first and that later." [3] The gaze constitutes the meaning of the image retroactively. And if, as Godard comments, one were oneself "filmed with a small video camera looking at Kim Novak, it would be possible to detect the moment when fiction begins" (78). Godard's example reminds us that whenever we turn on the TV we are always *en route* back to the mother. Before self identity attempts to reconstitute itself reflected in the recognized celebrity, the image system emerges in the guise of the mother.

As in the case of "The Purloined Letter," whether one assigns primacy to the scene in the bedroom (Lacan) or the library (Derrida), appearances can always be read as displacements of an "other scene" and another gaze. "Its the look that creates the fiction" (78), says Godard.

Hitchcock's Vertigo and Antonioni's Blow-Up re-screen Freud's techno-analogies as cinematic allegories of a photographic, or filmic, unconscious. Returning to the scene of the crime, the rerun and the close-up become the tools that are common to the worlds of the cinema and detection. McLuhan relates an anecdote about an African tribe who when questioned after watching an educational film stubbornly remembered only a chicken straying across the periphery of the image. Microscopic detail, analogous to the spectacular variety of movement that awed the first viewers of the Lumiere films (the wind swaying the branches of trees, the slight gestures of a child, etc.),[4] also became the primary resource of psychoanalysis. While such a wealth of new information is discovered with all the detachment of a scientific inquiry (the Lumieres couldn't see what all the fuss was about), this new world that surpasses the limits of human optics also encourages a mode of spatial immersion that transgresses limits and calls upon what Bataille saw as the electrifying power of the sacred. What drives the detective in Vertigo to re-stage the scene of the crime is the unacknowledged scene of his Oedipalization: the trauma of sexual difference that is staged sacrificially through the

scapegoating of the "simulacral" woman. The cinematic apparatus supports this repetition. Psychoanalysis reruns the tapes as a working through of a trauma that has as yet not found its articulation but only its projection. Insofar as peripheral details haunt the surface of the screen and point towards the other scene, their appearance is always potentially transgressive.

I have mentioned the Kennedy assassination as the paradigmatic example of TV's screening of history as a rerun. To escape TV's addictive structure one has to either turn it off ("cold turkey") or discover its potential to provide alternative narratives. The experimental writing of history proposed by Lukacher and derived from the notion of an undecideable event, would aim to counter the hegemony of any monumental installation that, Jean-Francois Lyotard explains, "requires the forgetting of that which may question the community and its legitimacy." [5] The reconstructive activity that Lukacher pursues can only mark, or gesture toward, what Lyotard explains "must be remembered as something that never ceases to be forgotten" (3). The sense of a primordial shock produced by an encounter with originary difference that remains beyond representation because it was never recognized, is nevertheless felt, as Freud noted, as "unconscious affect" (12) and so demands the impossible: that it be represented. Those who are unable to forget this non-memorable catastrophe and carry the burden of its unrepresentability Lyotard calls "the jews."

Rescreening becomes a forgetting of a more primal disturbance that must nevertheless be transmitted somehow as a transgression, or rupture, of the claims of representation itself. In order to re-make the case of Walter Benjamin, beginning with the scene in the Bibliotheque Nationale, in a mode attuned to this "affect," I will take a detour through Benjamin's childhood. "The dialectical image," writes Lukacher, "is Benjamin's version of the primal scene":

> Benjamin's dialectical images are situated in the unverifiable preontological zone between memory and imagination. Their authenticity can never be established because the dreaming collective that produced them no longer exists and could not confirm them if it did exist. They are the tentative responses to a politico-interpretive dilemma where knowledge of the origin is at once necessary and necessarily flawed. In the dialectical image the strategies of the avant-garde supplement the limitations of historical understanding.(280-281)

It is the (impossible) project of recovering these collective voices lost to history that guides the following reconstruction.

Hiding Places

In "Berlin Chronicle" Benjamin relates a childhood dream which prefigured, through the appearance of a ghost appearing in his room, the arrival of a gang of burglars who plundered his family home at night while his parents stood at his bedroom window desperately waiving for help. The dream can be read as giving expression to Benjamin's notion--applied in his studies of Goethe and Proust as well as himself--of the bourgeois writer as betrayer of his class. Benjamin's

father, who made his fortune dealing art, was betrayed by Benjamin's fascination with photography which, in the age of mechanical reproduction, would rob the art work of its elevated status (which it had, in its turn, divested of the sacred object). While the dream suggests a narrative of cultural revolution, it also anticipates the Nazi occupation of Paris--Benjamin's "spiritual home"--as the victory of barbarism in the capital of civilized Europe. The impotence of Benjamin's father in the face of the intruders colors the dream with the classical Oedipal scenario, but Benjamin also saw the dream as a "prophecy." [6] The scene of the family intersects in this story with the collective fate of the Jews. Like the Wolf Man's, Benjamin's dream puts us on the path toward a primal scene: not one that would pretend to account for Benjamin's neuroses but that would draw us back toward a sense of historical catastrophe. Benjamin's childhood dream forms an inter-text with the history of a lost collectivity that demands its (impossible) representation.

Benjamin's lover, the political activist Asja Lacis, describes how an alliance that transgresses social class can be formed through children's play:

> The children knew nothing about my plans. I gave them a scene from the play as a task for improvisation: Robbers sit around a fire in a forest and boast about their deeds. While working on this scene sometime later, the first visit of the *Besprisorniki* [street gang] took place in our house. The children jumped up and wanted to run away from the intruders who looked terrifying with paper helmets on their heads, armor made of branches and pieces of lead, and sticks and spears in their hands. I convinced the children to continue

> improvising and not to pay attention to the intruders. After a while the *Besprisorniki* leader Vanja strode into the middle of the group of children who were acting and signaled to his gang. They shoved the children aside and began to play the scene themselves. They bragged about murders, arson, robberies and, while doing this, they all sought to outdo one another in horror. Then they stood up and looked at our children with scornful condescension: "That's what real robbers are like!" According to all the rules of children's education I should have interrupted their wild and shameless speeches--but I wanted to gain some influence over them. And I actually won the game--the *Besprisorniki* returned and became active members of our theater.[7]

While Lacis actualizes a class alliance, Benjamin allies his dreams, memories, and critical positions to the fate of the proletariat. Lacis wanted to avoid outright class war by staging it as play, allowing new social alliances to form. In this her theater opposes the fascist orchestration of resentment and the scapegoating of marginal groups.

But what are the limits of such solidarity? For Lyotard the Final Solution names a massive attempt once an for all to deny the originary difference that is beyond the limits of conscious assimilation. The status of the Holocaust as the monumental catastrophe of TV culture can be seen as consistent with Lyotard's thesis. What story, or scene, could ever claim to "communicate" or account for what resonates behind the continued silencing of "the jews"? The life of Emanuel Ringelblum provides an example of the paradox of the Holocaust as history. Ringelblum (whose life was roughly contemporary with Benjamin's) was a teacher, historian and social worker who initiated, through the formation of the group "Oneg Shabbat," a collection of

documents to preserve the memory of the Jewish community, the liquidation of which he witnessed and in turn became a victim of. The group was responsible for the first world publicization, on BBC radio in 1942, of the Nazi genocidal aggression against the Jews. The group was also responsible for the burial of an archive, packed into sealed milk churns, below the Warsaw ghetto before its final "ethnic cleansing." After the war 40,000 pages of documentation were discovered.[8]

The archive of Oneg Shabbat survives along with the phantom of a museum planned by Hitler which would exhibit remains from an extinct Jewish culture and thereby claim--in an extreme, but representative, imperialist gesture--to have rescued what it had annihilated. For while the testimonies preserved by Oneg Shabbat form an invaluable memorial they also invite the question as to how effectively the collective experience they represent can be remembered through quantitative "coverage." The concealment of the Arcades Project by Bataille, as well as the loss of the manuscripts that Benjamin attempted to carry with him in his flight, have become part of the mythology of catastrophe also evoked by the Ringelblum story and whose image has become Benjamin's Angel of History. The documents left by the dead can only guarantee that their memory is "safe" with us, while the catastrophe that has overcome them only repels us as we reel in shock: so the Holocaust finds a contemporary memorial on videotape. The detail that strikes my attention in this

story is that the archive of Oneg Shabbat was hidden in a techno-substitute for the maternal body.

The story of Oneg Shabbat is included in an afterword to a collection of photographs taken by a German soldier in the Warsaw Ghetto shortly before the annihilation of its inhabitants. The photographic and filmic legacy of the Holocaust is testimony to the most extreme case of technical mastery providing a screen against shock. The camera, as a part of the machinic assemblage of extermination, registers posthumously the disturbance that should have been registered by the witness--if it had, his/her instrumentality in the process of destruction would have threatened to become "dysfunctional." Nevertheless, the appearance of these photos, hidden for fifty years, has an uncanny effect. Historical coverage always runs the risk of forgetting what remains unrepresentable in past experience. Experimental reconstruction risks its own historical legitimacy in the hope of recovering a sense of this loss, attempting to move away from any mourning that would establish monuments no longer open to further investigation and reinvention.

The "forgotten" scene in which Benjamin encounters Bataille tells the story of a sacrificial logic which the (unrepresentable) Forgotten continues to haunt. Lyotard, after Freud and Bataille, reminds us that sacrifice, as "the first representational economy," [9] is a means to monumentalize and thereby forget the trauma of originary difference (22). "The jews" are those who do not enjoy the

comfort of the denial served by the sacrificial economy of Christianity. Lyotard therefor challenges any alliance of Benjamin and Bataille that would repeat the repression of "the jews" as Other (39). To begin the history of Benjamin's relation to Bataille and the College of Sociology would be to recall all of the violence done in the name of, toward and against this cultural, religious, and philosophical difference during an entire epoch of European civilization. What is at stake for Lyotard in this drive to assimilate otherness is its functional role in the present era of what the Frankfurt School called "instrumental reason":

> Jew or Catholic, covenant or incarnation, holy or sacred, it could not matter less. What is of sole importance is that the energy that each individual commands is transformable into "work" in the sense of a general mechanics. . . .As regards "the jews," they do not appear evil, or inapt, to take on the challenge of mobilization, because they are the nomadism of thought, not riveted to their roots, but essentially transportable, like books, money, jewels, the violin. But they are evil if they are riveted to their book, to the stupor of a covenant, of an immemorial "shock" whose affection they try to reserve against all compromise. This present "society" has no need for this preservation, it forecloses it more than any other.(40)

The images that we conjure of the past both indicate and mask the "truth" of the Forgotten. Bataille's inquiry into the "accursed share" of sacred expenditure alerts us to the force of the heterogeneous that the architecture of sacrifice attempts to contain. To replay history is always to invoke the double sense of the screen: how it shows and conceals in the same movement.[10] It would be the ambition of a certain historiography after Benjamin not to forget that in unpacking certain constructions of the past it can repeat the gesture

of repression; it attempts to call upon the unrepresentable force of the Forgotten even as it moves away from it with the speed of Benjamin's angel.

Lyotard's argument brings him into sympathy with Adorno's "negative dialectics" (29) in which "All one can do is thread one's way through it, slip and slide through the ruins, listen to the complaints that emanate from them" (43). In this, Lyotard sees Adorno "coming around" to Benjaminian writing. But if Benjamin always exhibited a certain innocence, as Mehlman would have it, then there is a hope presented in his writings that Adorno, and following him Lyotard, will not admit "after Auschwitz." And if that "innocence," that transgressive relation to the mother's body was in some sense relatable to the "hope" that Ringelblum and Oneg Shabbat preserved in milk churns buried under the Warsaw Ghetto (surely containing not only "complaints" but every kind of recorded experience), then we may need to admit both Adorno and Bataille into our account of a Benjaminian writing. In a ruined landscape, vessels, cases, disappear, reappear, are sealed and reopened. So the story, Benjamin tells us, "resembles the seeds of grain which have lain for centuries in the chambers of the pyramids shut up airtight and have retained their germinative power to this day." [11]

Certainly these stories of buried archives resonate with the deep vibrations of that "affect" that recalls to us what has always been Forgotten, lost without hope of recovery. But this sense of the temporality of catastrophe is also

renewed only through such moments of partial recovery: this is not to turn the Holocaust into another "episode." Adorno's interpretation again presents itself on this point: "the core of Benjamin's philosophy is the idea of the salvation of the dead as the restitution of distorted life through the consummation of its own reification down to the inorganic level." In which case the milk churns of Oneg Shabbat can be understood as the already commodified form of a projected utopia where all experience might be remembered as well as lived. Meanwhile "The price of hope is life." [12]

On Foot

Benjamin took this return trip through the arcades of Paris back to his childhood excursions with his mother on the streets of Berlin[13] and emblematizes this work of recollection in an anecdote, in the autobiographical "Berlin Chronicle," in which he sits down in a cafe one day a draws a map (later mislaid) of his life:

> there are perhaps paths that lead us again and again to people who have one and the same function for us: passageways that always, in the most diverse periods of life, guide us to the friend, the betrayer, the beloved, the pupil, or the master. That is what the sketch of my life revealed to me as it took shape before me on that Paris afternoon.[14]

We can speculate about what part exactly Benjamin may have seen Bataille play in his life--but we know that Bataille was to provide the passage toward the reappearance of the Arcades Project. A year earlier, in "Berlin Chronicle," Benjamin had written: "It could happen to someone looking back over his

life that almost all the deeper obligations he had endured in its course originated in people on whose 'destructive character' everyone was agreed." [15] While Adorno has been credited with redeeming (as well as accused of repressing) Benjamin's legacy, Bataille has the reputation of a joyful nihilist. As scholar-librarian Bataille played a more conservative role. But there are earlier scenes that can help to decipher the meanings of Benjamin's immersion in the library.

In "The Seminar on the Purloined Letter" Lacan returned to the situation "in the royal *boudoir*" [that] "we shall straightway designate the primal scene" and the second scene in the Minister's rooms as its repetition.[16] Derrida, in his critical reading of Lacan's seminar, objects to the primary status Lacan so hastily confers on the exposure of the Queen's privates, and backtracks to "the other scene of its remaining" (197): Lacan had omitted any attention to (among other things) the opening scenes of Poe's tale that take place in a "little back library, or book closet" (6)(The college of Sociology gathered in the backroom of a bookstore[17]). For Derrida this other scene is where "Everything begins in a library: in books, writings, references. Therefor nothing begins. Only a drifting or disorientation from which one does not emerge" (198). The bedroom or the library? In Benjamin's remembrances of childhood (following Proust) these two scenes merge, stereoscopically. The Oedipal child-detective gives himself

over to the "soft drift of the text" [18] as a space of womb-like immersion.

In the early experiment that led to the Arcades Project, One Way Street (in a section called "Enlargements"), Benjamin conjured with remembered scenes of childhood; for example in the image of a child hiding: "Standing behind the doorway curtain, the child becomes himself something floating and white, a ghost . . . .And behind the door he is himself door, wears it as his heavy mask and as a shaman will bewitch all those who unsuspectingly enter." For Benjamin regressive immersion in the material contained a revolutionary possibility: the petrified promises to spring back to life, the lost cause to rise up "with a shout of self deliverance" (74). In the same way, Benjamin would later attempt to enter into the phantasmagoria of the arcades and subvert their spellbinding power from within. The image of the child hiding belongs to a series which includes "Child reading" and "Child pilfering," reminding us that for Benjamin the interpretive process was related to that of copying--in its double sense of citation and mimicry--as tactile appropriation. Like the child hiding, the child reading becomes immersed in the text to the point of disappearance: "entered it with limitless trust . . . seeks his way along half-hidden paths . . . his breath is part of the air of the events narrated . . . he mingles with the characters" (71-72). Benjamin ends his essay "Unpacking my Library" by

disappearing into the "dwelling" he has erected from his books, "as is only fitting." [19]

"Fitting" also that a significant part of the Arcades Project should disappear temporarily into the archives of the Bibliotheque Nationale, from which it had drawn so much sustenance. In fact the same Bibliotheque where Benjamin conducted his scholarly research "resembles the subsequent design for department stores: stack rooms (*magasin central*) and four stories with an atrium of grid walk-ways (*passerelles*), all under one glass roof." [20] In the library the scholar perhaps rediscovers the tactile pleasures he experienced (or was denied) in the company of his mother on shopping expeditions. On these walks through the city with his mother, Benjamin "always kept half a step behind her" [21] --another gesture of refusal to form a united front with the world of his parents. This world, whose economic basis was shrouded in secrecy, received its "official" image from these shopping excursions with his mother to Berlin's "best" department stores, and another "unknown and slightly sinister one" from his father's dealings in auction rooms:

> from which, from time to time, he also brought home a purchase. I doubt that this commerce was an altogether happy one, with the exception perhaps of his carpet buying. Shortly before his death he told me that he could distinguish the qualities of a pile with the ball of his foot, if his soles were suitably thin. (294)

The middle-class world of Benjamin's parents is insulated from the harsh realities of city life represented in Benjamin's writings by the image of the street. In rebellion

against this world, the child forms an imaginary alliance with those outside:

> I never slept on the street in Berlin. . . . Only those for whom poverty or vice turns the city into a landscape in which they stray from dark till sunrise know it in a way denied to me. (316)

This alliance is to be associated, retrospectively, with the world of Asja Lacis and revolutionary politics; in an earlier essay, his account of his trip to the Soviet Union (where he had visited Lacis) Benjamin had written: "One ought to know Moscow as such beggar children know it" (185).

The theme of *flanerie* that permeates Benjamin's works will connect the apparently opposed worlds of the library and the street: copying a text is compared to walking a country road (50); cities reveal themselves in the quest to purchase books;[22] and the city itself becomes a landscape: "signboards and street names, passers-by, roofs, kiosks, or bars must speak to the wanderer like a cracking twig under his foot in the forest." [23] In his study of Baudelaire, the figure of the *flaneur* is mirrored by that of the ragpicker who "catalogues and collects" "Everything that the big city threw away . . . everything it crushed underfoot" [24] --the work of the bibliophile finally discovers his proletarian alliance in the common labor of deciphering the text of the street.

Yet while Benjamin's feet learn to identify with the homeless wanderer, the sight of other's feet also become a source of repulsion. Climbing the stairs between the corridors and classrooms of his boys school becomes, as on the walks with his mother, a motivation for solitude, while

the normal distaste with which the well-to-do view the poor is directed towards Benjamin's own class. The mass of school children, "formless and ignoble" [25] exposes Benjamin to "the bad odors emanating from all the bodies pressing so closely against me" (338). This passage in Benjamin's writing between the escape made possible by *flanerie* and the base qualities associated with feet of the bourgeoisie, returns us to Bataille, who attended to the question of the foot only a few years before Benjamin's "Berlin Chronicle" in his 1929 essay "The Big Toe." [26] Bataille suggests that feet are one of the well kept secrets of civilized life because their connections to the lowly subvert as well as support the idealisms of the head. The modern middle-class has learned to conceal the feet and in this they become associated with the alienated labor that supports capital. Feet consequently become the object of perverse fetishization.

Roland Barthes has cited Bataille's essay "The Big Toe" as an inquiry relevant to his notion of an "obtuse meaning" discoverable in the marginal details of film stills.[27] Barthes' formulation recalls Benjamin's "optical unconscious"--the revelation of previously imperceptible visual detail made possible by filmic technology: "Even if one has a general knowledge of the way people walk, one knows nothing of a person's posture during the fractional second of a stride." [28] Barthes' third meaning becomes another attempt to articulate the unrepresentable that haunts every representation. The historical catastrophe that overcame

Benjamin would appear as an "obvious" meaning containing the more obtuse meanings explored in Benjamin's autobiographical recollections. For example, Benjamin describes an early encounter with a flood in the street on his way home from school: "in a primeval forest I should not have been more abandoned than here on Kurfurstenstrasse." [29] In this memory the primal catastrophe could be said to resonate without the baggage of historical monumentality.

In June 1940, Benjamin would be forced to leave Paris and in this way join the massive nomadization of the city. The population hit the streets not in the form of a revolutionary upheaval but in flight from nationalist aggression and ethnic and political persecution. At the peak of the evacuation Paris was reduced to a third of its usual population.[30] Because of the expense of escape, the wealthy quarters of the city were the most empty(293). The weather was warm (165). What finally saved Paris from being leveled in a German assault was the declaration by the French commander that Paris was an open city: it would not attempt to defend itself from occupation (297).

Notes

[1] See Beverle Houston, "Viewing Television: The Metapsychology of Endless Consumption," Quarterly Review of Film Studies Summer 1984, pp. 183-195.

[2] On the other hand, Houston's description of TV recalls Erik Erikson's classic psychological study of the American adolescent, in which a demonized "Mom" reproduces social conformity by submitting the infant too early to the temporal regulation of its body functions. TV would seem to continue the work of "Mom" in controlling and limiting pleasure and

extending socialization through the industrial regulation of time. See Childhood and Society (New York: Norton, 1950) pp. 247-283.

[3] Jean-Luc Godard, "*Introduction a une veritable histoire du cinema*" Camera Obscura 8-9-10 Fall 1982 p. 78.

[4] Life to those Shadows, p. 18.

[5] Jean-Francois Lyotard, Heidegger and "the jews", trans. Andreas Michel & Mark S. Roberts (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1990) p. 3.

[6] One Way Street, p. 341.

[7] Asja Lacis, "A Memoir," trans. Jack Zipes. Performance Vol 1 No. 5 March/April 1973, pp. 26-27.

[8] Rafael F. Scharf (ed.), In the Warsaw Ghetto: Summer 1941, Photographs by Willy Georg with passages from Warsaw Ghetto Diaries (New York: Aperture, 1993) pp. 109-110.

[9] Heidegger and 'the jews", p. 21

[10] Jeffrey Mehlman comments directly on the scene of Bataille's taking custody of Benjamin's manuscripts and reads in it an allegory of Bataille's continuing hold, through his poststructuralist successors, on a contemporary criticism that fails to confront the legacies of French anti-Semitism. Mehlman sees Benjamin's delayed flight from Paris--fraternizing with Bataille's group rather than fleeing to Jerusalem or New York--as a symptom of a Jewish death-drive, or desire for assimilation even under the guise of revolutionary messianism. I disagree with Mehlman's interpretation insofar as Benjamin was literally "freed from Bataille's custody" long before being freed from Adorno's or Scholem's. I also believe Mehlman overly emphasizes Benjamin's relation to Judaism at the expense of his Marxist sympathies. See Legacies of Anti-Semitism in France, p. 90.

[11] Illuminations, p. 89-90.

[12] Theodor Adorno, Prisms, trans. Samuel and Shierry Weber (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1981) p. 241.

[13] Primal Scenes, p. 279.

[14] One Way Street, p. 319.

[15] One Way Street, p. 157.

[16] John P. Muller & William J. Richardson (eds.), The Purloined Poe: Lacan, Derrida and Psychoanalytic Reading (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1988) p. 30.

[17] College of Sociology, p. 5.

[18] One Way Street, p. 71.

[19] Illuminations, p. 67.

[20] Window Shopping, p. 79.

[21] One Way Street, p. 294.

[22] Illuminations, p. 63.

[23] One Way Street, p. 298.

[24] Walter Benjamin, Charles Baudelaire: A Lyric Poet in an Age of High Capitalism, trans. Harry Zohn (London: Verso, 1983) p. 79.
[25] One Way Street, p. 302.
[26] Visions of Excess, pp. 20-23.
[27] Roland Barthes, Image Music Text, trans. Stephen Heath (New York: Noonday, 1988) p. 60.
[28] Illuminations, p. 237.
[29] One Way Street, p. 299.
[30] Herbert R. Lottman, The Fall of Paris: June 1940 (New York: Harper Collins, 1992) p. 147.

CHAPTER 3
EXTINCT AMERICA

Adorno's return to Frankfurt in 1953 marks the end of his period of exile in America. Benjamin had called Paris "Capital of the Nineteenth Century"--glimpsing the archaic forms of market capitalism in the boulevards and arcades of Paris that were soon to be transformed under the Nazi occupation and further in the post-war era. The passage from the age of mechanical reproduction to that of electronic information, from European dominance by print culture to the global intrusion of television, takes place via America--or, more specifically, Hollywood. Laurence Rickels explains how California becomes the site of a mutation of certain European inventions, the embodiment of Adorno's diagnosis--originally applied to German fascism--that the new media culture produced an effect of "psychoanalysis in reverse." [1] "Here in America," wrote Adorno and Horkheimer, "there is no difference between a man and his economic fate." [2] Every new wave of immigrants to the New World is told to forget their past; in this way "America" becomes the name of a mythic better life that holds in place the denial of a massive otherness of experience: "History is eliminated in oneself and others out of a fear that it may remind the individual of

the degeneration of his own existence--which itself continues" (216).

Anyone who has ever lived in a foreign country will have experienced the particular form of homesickness that finds its expression through filmic media. To the homesick viewer it becomes less important whether any film or TV program set in the homeland is "good" as much as whether one is offered or denied views of the lost place. The homesick viewer picks up the habit of searching the surface of the screen for glimpses of anything that may belong to one's own experience; s/he refuses the focus of the action or story to the extent that s/he becomes an active searcher in the mediascape where anything may become a sign of what is loved and faraway.

The cinematic apparatus developed as an ideological instrument for, among other things, simulating a sense of community lost in industrial metropolitan life. As Hollywood tells it, those who fled Paris sought departure for America from Lisbon, but were often forced into a detour via Casablanca and so spent time waiting at the Cafe Americain--capital of the twentieth century. Rick's, as a metonym for Hollywood, performs the role of a cinema where an international community of displaced persons can assemble and plan their private escapes.

Adorno and Horkheimer used The Odyssey to explain the legacy of the epic hero in Dialectic of Enlightenment. Odysseus's journey home, the reinscription of mythic space and time prefigures the alienated hero of the modern novel

and becomes an emblem of the drive toward rational domination of nature inherent in the European enlightenment tradition:

> If it is the fixed order of property dependent on the settled life that grounds the human alienation in which originates all homesickness and all longing for the lost primal state of man, it is nevertheless the settled life and fixed property (only in which the notion of a homeland can appear) to which all longing and all homesickness are directed.(78)

Television, as the synthesis of media that most completely embodies the culture industry, advances the alienation of the subject by appearing in the home and simulating primal belonging as passive reception of images. TV becomes the apocalyptic fulfillment of the dialectic of enlightenment--the negation of myth and the mystification of reason--that puts both Odysseus and Robinson Crusoe on the circuit from "universal socialization" to "absolute solitude" (62).

The heroic flight in The Odyssey departs from a defeated fortress and results in the renewal of a settled community (analogously, the story of Benjamin's death begins with the fall of Paris to the Nazi invaders). Lacan's comment that "the formation of *I* is symbolized in dreams by a fortress" [3] helps to explain the narrative form I have been discussing in which the collapse of one social identity opens the way for a quest to found another and in turn to forget its own violent origins. What form of national identity would allow for a working through of the past that no longer repressed the ethnic difference and conflict upon which it is built? The symptoms of the fortress mentality, Lacan reminds us, are

clear: "obsessional neurosis--inversion, isolation, reduplication, cancellation and displacement" (5).

If Casablanca is the archetypal melodrama that provides a mass screen memory blocking a sense of historical catastrophe, then the reconstruction of the individual's life is the metanarrative that organizes the American culture industry, given classic form in the journey in Citizen Kane from Colorado to Xanadu. Kane, as a representative of the apparatus of mass communications, is shown in his passage from child to adult as a posthumous reconstruction of the individual, pluralized through the different genres of the new media. Citizen Kane, which like Casablanca has taken on mythic status in the age of the video archive and academic film studies, poses as an "ur-form" of the states of subjectivity in the media age: although it dramatizes the role of print literacy in dominating public consiousness it has more to do with its own cinematic form.

In 1939 Benjamin had tried to find a buyer in America for the picture "Angelus Novus" that was to be safely concealed in the cases in the Bibliotheque Nationale.[4] The vast sprawl of packing cases that house Kane's plundering of the art treasures of old Europe are panned over in the final shots of the film like the skyline of a modern metropolis (the cities of New York and Chicago where the film is set): the metropolitan amassing of objects becomes equivalent to that of the mass production of news stories with their repackaging of social memory. The packing cases are also

analogous to the armor that protects the modern subject, entombed before death in the monumental Xanadu (which, like Rick's, resembles a movie palace), against the intrusion of memory. The memory for "the individual of the degeneration of his own existence" is emblematized by the miniature snowfall held in the glass ball that rolls from Kane's dying hand. The trajectory of this miniature object with its accompanying sound, the whispered "Rosebud," provides the paradox that will organize the telling of Kane's life as montage reconstruction.

The question "Who is the individual in modern times?" is posed in a context where the archive is broken into and public memory is shaped by men like Kane who "make the news." Kane is shown to operate the machinery of the stage upon which he himself becomes the victim; then as maintained in the living death of legend produced by the factory that carries his name. Meanwhile the tactile intimacies of the lost home and mother haunt the tomb of this half-life in their reified form as a commodity: tradition is shattered, home is lost, both to be replaced by the continual re-running of the American dream. Kane's relation to Susan Alexander, the girl he meets on the street, dramatizes the way that the god-like voice of the media will reproduce in its own image the consumer--"a cross section of the American public," as Kane jokes about Susan--as glamorous star, proof that anyone can make it to Xanadu. The "dumbness" of the potential star is a remnant of the longed for lost innocence of the world of

home and mother, the prelapsarian world of childhood when all objects had not yet been reduced to exchange value. The memory of the mother's body is guarded by the monumental superego, so there remains something childlike about Susan that is kept from assuming active power, endlessly reconstructing instead a made-to-order image (a jig-saw puzzle emblematic of filmic montage) within the palace/prison, tactile experience under the spell of dazzled eye.

According to Adorno and Horkheimer's analysis, the commodified body built an armor that repressed the cultural memory retained in the body: the other landscapes the body had once been sensitized to by inhabiting. This repression produced a fascistic subject that amounted to the foreclosure of historical memory that could potentially offer resistance to the reconstruction of the past by mass media. Distance was now experienced only as scientist objectivity, i.e. instrumental reason. In the temporal dimension of habit memory, therefor, lay a "revolutionary nostalgia": a desire to recover the social in the totality of its lived relations. Under such conditions the task of critique would be to undermine the character armor of the functional, reified imaginary and reawaken corporeal mnemonics--including a sense of an unrepresentable loss. Critical distance would then be no longer understood as the function of disembodied reason but reimagined as founded in the memory of the body as a lost and faraway country that must somehow be mourned. In an

inversion of the ethnographer, whose distance guarantees the objectivity of his observations, the outsider who looks on from another place and who dreams of the lost time of his/her own ethnicity forms the enclave of an unassimilable critique displaced in the social body.

In his "Theses on the Philosophy of History," Benjamin cited Flaubert: "Few will be able to guess how sad one had to be in order to resuscitate Carthage." [5] If America comes to represent, through its globalized culture industries of Hollywood and television, a certain foreclosure of history, then Benjamin points toward the work of critical reconstruction that must be attempted in an age of electronic media. Benjamin, who recognized before McLuhan the catastrophic end that electronic media presented to the values of classical literacy--critical distance, rationality, privacy, objective judgment--has become what he feared he might if he came to America: the "last European." [6] Out of the preserves of the cult, Benjamin traced the destiny of the object into its ghostly afterlife as commodity. Since Adorno received them from Bataille, we have been unpacking the cases of Walter Benjamin--like everything else, they have become part of an economy of exchange in the cultural market place.

> case -- receptacle, a box and its contents [O. Fr. *casse*]
>
> cash -- to turn into, or exchange for, money [O. Fr. *casse*]

In her essay on Benjamin that served as the introduction to the first collection of his writings in English, Illuminations (1968), Hannah Arendt began with a meditation on the singularity of posthumous fame. Posthumous fame, according to Arendt, is "uncommercial and unprofitable"(1); the first gesture that seeks to define Benjamin for an English readership is one that distances him from the market place. And although the next book by Benjamin to appear in English--Charles Baudelaire: A Lyric Poet in the Era of High Capitalism (1973), a collection of three essays that were various departures from the larger Arcades Project--was a study of the commodification of the writer in the nineteenth-century, Arendt had already begun her introduction of Benjamin to English readers with a denial of his exchange value. Benjamin had argued, in "The Author as Producer," that given he constraints on the author enforced by social class and a capitalist economy, what mattered was "the exemplary character of production" [7] --the author would demonstrate effective responses to the political situation in which s/he was situated. The gesture that defines the author emerges, in the case of Benjamin, out of an economy within which Marx had distinguished the different status of use and exchange value. Benjamin had learned from Marx's analysis to redefine the author in opposition to those aesthetic doctrines that had dominated the European culture in which his career took its shape. The cultic value of the object immersed in traditional ritual now gave way to the "cult of

the movie star" that "fostered by the money of the film industry, preserves not the unique aura of the person but the 'spell of the personality,' the phony spell of a commodity." [8]

In his afterlife, Benjamin has taken on exchange value as a cultural stereotype, a hero of dispossession and displacement. The posthumous emergence of Benjamin onto the intellectual scene over the last 40 years has been shaped by Arendt's narrative of the cruel misfortunes that buried him in the debris of his disastrous era: a literati in a market economy, a Jew in Nazi Germany, a "useless" Marxist. Clumsy and incompetent due to his upper middle class background, Arendt portrays Benjamin as an almost comic type--comic in a Kafkian sense. Yet as he wrote of Kafka's hybrid creature/object Odradek--a spool of thread occasionally encountered on the stairs, in corridors or the attic--Benjamin himself has taken on "the form which things assume in oblivion." [9] Emerging from lost time, Benjamin re-appears, in the guise of his unfinished Arcades Project, in a ruined, Odradek-like shape that continues a passage through new cultural landscapes.

Some want to prescribe the limits of this process of transformation: for Arendt, whose chosen image (from The Tempest) is the body of the drowned father that "doth suffer a sea-change/Into something rich and strange"(38); and she closes her introductory essay with this final evocation:

> Like a pearl diver who descends to the bottom of the sea, not to excavate the bottom and bring it to light

> but to pry loose the rich and the strange, the pearls and the coral in the depths, and to carry them to the surface, this thinking delves into the depths of the past -- but not in order to resuscitate it the way it was and to contribute to the renewal of extinct ages. What guides this thinking is the conviction that although the living is subject to the ruin of time, the process of decay is at the same time a process of crystallization, that in the depth of the sea, into which sinks and is dissolved what once was alive, some things "suffer a sea-change" and survive in new crystallized forms and shapes that remain immune to the elements, as though they waited only for the pearl diver who one day will come down to them and bring them up into the world of the living -- as "thought fragments," as something "rich and strange," and perhaps even as everlasting *Urphanomene*. (50-51)

This allegory of recovery can be read in its double sense as descriptive of the way that Arendt imagines her own project of presenting Benjamin to a new readership (Arendt herself often reads Benjamin for self-reflexive tropes in his critical writings). This rescue operation is not exactly a resuscitation: the object remains inert, fossilized, crystalline. Arendt's evocation of those "shapes that remain immune to the elements" reveals a desire for permanence and stability in the truth that Benjamin embodies for her.

Another "pearl diver" who follows Hannah Arendt in introducing Benjamin to an English readership is George Steiner, who in his introduction to The Origin of German Tragic Drama (1977) insists that Benjamin's "genuine intellectual, psychological home" could have been the Warburg Institute: "an invitation to London might have saved his early death"(19)--Benjamin might have been rescued and conserved by art history. Benjamin, writes Steiner, knew that "critical intelligence . . . resides in the always-

threatened keeping of the very few" (24)--a proposition that Terry Eagleton would denounce as "the exact reverse of the truth" in the preface to his study of Benjamin (the first book-length discussion of Benjamin to appear in English).[10] Walter Benjamin or Toward a Revolutionary Criticism (1981).

Richard Wolin, whose Walter Benjamin: An Aesthetic of Redemption (1982) was the second book on Benjamin to appear in English, opens his preface by remarking that Benjamin's "life . . . was marked by a series of failures and misfortunes"--a by now familiar charicature shared by Eagleton in his evocation of a "doomed, poignant figure" (3)--but goes on to say: "Unfortunately . . . it has been the idiosyncratic side of Benjamin, as a personality, as an intellectual, which has captured the imagination of so many American interpreters and critics"(x). The custody of Benjamin's public memory is entrusted in Anglo-American letters initially to fellow Jewish writers--Arendt, Steiner, Sontag--who are persistent in portraying him as a fragile bibliophile and abstruse scholar whose engagements with Marxism were "absurd" (Arendt) [11] or "highly ambiguous" (Steiner).[12] Wolin continues in this vein when he writes that once Benjamin's anti-fascist "political stance was translated into theoretical terms, the version of Marxism that resulted was often one that was extremely undialectical and simplistic" (xiv). In their mythologizing of the man of letters of a lost age these writers make Benjamin a figure attractive to a Cold War society defined by a foreclosure of

radical communism as a political option; their images of Benjamin are powerful to the degree that we willingly identify with a nostalgia for an age and culture from which we are excluded.[13]

In an analogous way, returning to Benjamin's insights for guidance, while photography facilitated the technological destruction of cultic value, particularly that of the art work (and in this sense it was revolutionary), it immediately gave rise to its own cultic practices:

> The cult of remembrance of loved ones, absent or dead, offers a last refuge for the cult value of the picture. For the last time the aura emanates from the early photographs in the fleeting expression of a human face. This is what constitutes their melancholy, incomparable beauty.[14]

Benjamin reminds us that what "should happen" according top the logic of cultural revolution more often that not fails to come to pass. Describing a series of portrait photographs of Benjamin, Susan Sontag, in her introduction to the collection One Way Street and Other Writings (1979), focuses on their melancholy, saturnine expression. Once again, in Sontag's essay, Benjamin's image is fetishized and elevated to the status of cult object.[15]

The geographical displacements that characterize Benjamin's life have been mapped by Buck-Morss in the opening pages of The Dialectics of Seeing. Buck-Morss's commentaries on Benjamin have sought to revise many of the assumptions shared in several introductory studies by earlier writers. What Buck-Morss shares with all of the Anglo-American

interpreters of Benjamin whom I have mentioned so far is the theme of *exile* as a prominent feature of their critical writings. Arendt made it a concern of her career to assert the political viability of "the tradition of a minority of Jews . . . who preferred the status of 'conscious pariah'" [16] to assimilation into European society (her examples include Heine, Kafka, and Benjamin). Following Arendt both Steiner and Sontag devoted much of their attention to studies of European emigre intellectuals. The notion that the writer in exile is the quintessential hero of modern literature is voiced explicitly by Georges Steiner in his collection of essays Extra-Territorial.[17] Benjamin's translation into English ushers him into the company of the most famous figures in the literature of the post-war years; all variously displaced across languages and national boundaries: Nabokov, Beckett, Borges, Canetti, etc.

Those Marxist interpreters of Benjamin I have mentioned share this interest in the question of exile: Buck-Morss has written histories of Adorno and Benjamin as refugee intellectuals; Berger himself writes in exile and often about the lives of migrant workers; Eagleton wrote Exiles and Emigres,[18] a study of modern English writing by various outsider figures separated from majority culture either by national or class origins. What becomes evident in these different representations of Benjamin is a shared process of *identification* on the part of his apologists. Both Arendt and Steiner write out of their own international experience,

the others also from self-declared positions of cultural, social, and political alienation.

By Freud's definition in The Ego and the Id (1923), "the character of the ego is a precipitate of abandoned object-cathexes and . . . it contains the history of those object choices" [19] : Freud asks that we imagine the ego as a kind of graveyard containing various monuments representing identifications with idealized figures, the primary model for all of whom is the father. The melancholy contemplation of Benjamin's image, supported by images of his entombment in their written portraits by his admirers, supports the analysis that Benjamin has been elevated to super-ego status in the work of these various critics who survive him. This elevation is revealed by psychoanalysis to be haunted by ambivalence toward the dead. Even Eagleton's book on Benjamin, which openly declares a desire to "manhandle" Benjamin's texts, with an adjacent gesture proposes to "blast them out of the continuum of history, in ways I think he would have approved." [20]

"Why bother oneself with dead literature?" asked Asja Lacis of Benjamin. Benjamin's reply was that "his inquiry was not merely an academic piece of research; it had a direct connection to the very actual problems of contemporary literature." [21] In contrast to Benjamin's vision of the past actively engaged in the present, the portrayal of Benjamin by writers like Arendt, Steiner, and Sontag engage in posthumous glorification. As Freud explained, the ambivalence disguised

by melancholic fetishization thereby becomes vulnerable to narcissistic, regressive pleasures that, while allowing for the object to be gradually let go, deny and subvert its value and power. In this way the avant-garde project of social experimentation that Benjamin actively supported is entombed under his name.

In her denial of Benjamin's exchange value, Arendt attempts to preserve Benjamin from emerging into a market that will destroy what she wishes to maintain is his original value; yet at the same time her portrayal of him is itself a gesture that transforms Benjamin into a "personality." [22] Arendt's portrait of Benjamin cannot be understood separated from the historical gesture, analyzed by herself in The Origins of Totalitarianism, of the predicament of the Jew in European society as driven to satisfying the appetite of the bourgeoisie for exceptional individuals.[23] Benjamin's death also provides an instance of the disappearance into anonymity of the individual that Arendt claimed was the singular achievement of the totalitarian state. Thus the Jew, following Arendt's argument, served European culture as the charicature of the individual as well as became the historical victim of the demise of the individuality as a social possibility--the concentration camps reduced humans to a spectacle of use value, to soap. In an age of electronic simulacra it is the proliferation rather than the protection, the ready availability rather than the scarcity, of the image that produces an auratic effect rather than detracting from

it--thus reversing Benjamin's proposition that the aura would disappear with mass production and distribution (a lesson clearly demonstrated by Andy Warhol).

casino (It.) -- a little house
casa blanca (Sp.) -- white house [24]

Robert Ray outlines some of the thematic paradigms that underlie the mythic patterns of classic Hollywood cinema and finds their precursors in the nineteenth century American novel. Casablanca's Rick joins the long list of Hollywood's outlaw heroes, whose maverick individualism and unwillingness to submit to larger social concerns are consistently vindicated as the superior means of resolving complex situations.[25] Typically, Rick wants to steer clear of a "European" war. Instead he becomes caught up in events and is forced to make a series of heroic acts to save the lives of others (all the while refusing castration: "I stick my neck out for nobody").

The myth of Benjamin as the "last intellectual" has its beginnings in Arendt's double presentation of Benjamin as both a disappearing European and an outlaw hero. Arendt mixes phrases like "Chinese courtesy" (9), "old fashioned,"(19) "harmless, [and] marginal" (27) with statements like: "the very notion of . . . becoming a useful member of society would have repelled him" (4). Ray's definition of the American hero exhibiting a regressive

attachment to adolescent behaviors combined with a distrust of institutions coincides with Arendt's description of the *homme de lettres*, whose "intellectual attitude rested upon their resolute refusal to be integrated politically or socially" (27).

Benjamin had himself pursued the distinction between official and outlaw hero in his essay on Baudelaire, who had turned the conventional identification with the detective toward sympathy with the criminal. The hero was re-imagined as the Apache who "abjures virtue and laws; he terminates the *contrat social* forever." [26] While Benjamin notes the illusory nature of this apachedom, in which a "criminal career is a career like any other" (79), there is clearly an element of identification in his study of Baudelaire, which subsequently shifts to attend to the figure of the ragpicker in Baudelaire's poems. While Benjamin reads the *gestus* of the poet to situate him historically, his critical procedure is also mimetic: he defines his own "literary montage" as concerned with "Only the trivia, the trash" [27] of history.

The critic, like the poet or novelist, invents through mimicry. He, too, imagines himself as the outsider. But while in Baudelaire identification with the social outcast is sublimated as artistic heroism and then exchanged as a literary commodity, Benjamin turns the *gestus* toward a critical purpose. The same could not so easily be claimed for Arendt, whose persistent emphasis on Benjamin's prolonged suspension of commitment or conformity--to the Communist

Party, the Institute for Social Research, Scholem in Jerusalem, or his middle-class family--in combination with the notion of his bad luck as a metonym for the catastrophic end of old Europe, supported her own paradoxical alliance with America in the role of a Jewish "pariah." In Arendt's representation of Benjamin, mystification overtakes dialectical criticism and the end of classical literacy, with its mythos of the scholar-intellectual, undergoes a mutation in the age of television.

The cult movie has become a popular, parodic form of "sublimated" (I will not say "redeemed") trash. Umberto Eco suggests that the prerequisite for a film becoming a cult object is that "It should not reveal a coherent philosophy of composition." [28] Like Benjamin's writings or "America"--or theoretically any or all text, but perhaps more openly than most--it lends itself to conflicting interpretations. The image of Bogart in Casablanca--white tuxedo and black bow tie--has become a mass produced pop icon to be seen today in any shopping mall. While Rick exemplifies the contradictory behaviors of the American hero, he is one of the few native born Americans (playing the part of an overseas exile) who stars in Casablanca: the rest were mostly immigrants.[29] While Ray sees this fact as representative of classic Hollywood's cosmopolitanism, [30] Anthony Heilbut has suggested that "Casablanca's cynical nihilistic amoralism is foreign to America." [31]

Like Casablanca, Arendt's portrait of Benjamin raises the question: emigre sensibility or mythic American individualism? Heilbut comments:

> The characters in American literature are often as not rootless, restless travelers. This is a metaphorical situation, far removed from the concrete circumstances of being "hounded out by seven nations," yet, combined with the popular European image of a nation of frontiersmen, it suggested that Americans lacked a firm locus of self, while the refugees, with no space at all to maneuver, knew only too well who and what they were. Paradoxically, those committed to a group spirit saw quickly through the myths of American character, discovering the "rugged individualist" to be amorphous, fragmented, overdetermined by his society.[32]

Under the economic, social, and political pressures of the Cold War this critical distance broke down, as emigre writers, film directors, and critics learned to survive and prosper in America. Sometimes this could be done by emphasizing their difference: becoming an accepted eccentric. Arendt is one example of this tendency in emigre behavior, although while she chose to celebrate certain aspects of the American tradition she remained fiercely controversial in her positions on public issues. Many who failed to adapt, for example the novelist Hermann Broch, died in poverty and obscurity.[33] Adorno cultivated the most aloof of emigre personas and eventually returned to Germany. Others, like Douglas Sirk, later claimed to have been engaging in subversion behind a mask of apparent conformity to the demands of the American market place.

The assumption I will make for the purposes of this discussion is that the textual heterogeneity in the case of

Walter Benjamin and Casablanca, embodies an unresolved tension between European and American sensibilities under the impact of a global catastrophe. Another figure who mediates these two texts is the actor Peter Lorre, connected to Benjamin through their common friendship with Brecht (who wrote poems in exile paying tribute to both men). In Casablanca Lorre, in the character of Ugarte, sets in motion the circulation that drives the film's plot. Ugarte steals the transit papers from German officers and gives them to Rick who hides them in Sam's piano. Ilse (Ingrid Bergman), the other "object" of circulation, negotiates with Rick for the papers on behalf of her husband Victor Laszlo. The original theft of the papers also motivates the film's catch phrase, "Round up the usual suspects," which both opens and closes the action.

As with every narrative, Casablanca exhibits a particular economy of exchange. When Rick tells the cynical Ferrari, who profits by exploiting stranded refugees, "I don't buy and sell human beings" he makes an interesting historical comment on America's role in global history and politics. The special place occupied by Sam's piano--where the Germans never bother to look for the concealed papers--is reinforced by the map of Africa that fills the screen during the opening credits. As Ray notes, the Rick-Sam relationship repeats in several ways the Huck-Jim story (107-109) from Huckleberry Finn. The first moving images we see in Casablanca are news reel shots of refugees fleeing across

Europe, more of which are later inserted into the flashback sequence when Rick recalls his liaison with Ilsa in Paris just before the occupation. Slavery, global displacement, the reduction of humans to commodities--these are some of the central themes of Casablanca.

When Ilsa enters Rick's place after his flashback to their shared days in Paris, she takes on the quality of a ghostly apparition. We later learn that their love affair was premised on the denial of Victor Laszlo's internment in a Nazi concentration camp. As Victor returns from the dead for Ilsa, so Ilsa returns for Rick. In the end Rick will apparently stick his neck out for nobody: the nonperson, or political refugee. Does this heroic risk suggest a recognition of America's "secret" identity? While Ray sees in Rick's actions the avoidance of choice (110) (castration by marriage), Rick will be magically absolved of responsibility for his actions in the punch line of the film--"Round up the usual suspects"--which relays the blame for his actions onto the the fugitives who remain trapped and unprotected by law in Casablanca.

If Rick's infantile confrontations with Ilsa embody what Erik Erikson saw as the American child's sense of being abandoned too early by the mother,[34] the film's family scene serves as a displacement of the larger historical forces that underlie the formation of the "rebel without a cause." The global diaspora of populations resettled in America would necessitate the forgetting of their respective home countries

and cultures. According to Erikson, the American became a conformist because his/her body had been submitted too early to the regimes demanded by the industrial regulation of time. So even the nonconformist would be condemned to the bitter search to reconstitute the negative utopia of an emotional immediacy s/he had been denied in infancy. Ilsa, who connects Rick to European traditions and political struggles, remains tragically unpossessible (so Ingrid Bergman would later "reject" Hollywood). Americans have made allegorical journeys to the "old world"--for example Hawthorn's discovery in the nineteenth century of the melancholy ruins of Rome. Rick, who left Paris on the day of the occupation--the primal scene, disrupting the staged film with actual newsreels--is the American melancholic who, caught in the Oedipal triangle, acts out his own mourning play by regaining then renouncing his lost love.

Benjamin claimed to have written his book on the *Trauerspiel* at a table in a cafe sitting near a jazz band.[35] A strong candidate for Hollywood's mourning anthem would be "As Time Goes By," the persistent refrain that also embodies everything Adorno found regressive in popular music. The repeated promise that a kiss is still a kiss (when we don't know if it ever really was) anticipates TV's recycling of old time movies in which Casablanca emerges as a popular favorite. Nostalgia serves its function here as a screen memory for the catastrophe of homelessness that has become TV's "other scene" on perpetual rerun.

Elias Canetti comments that the fall of Paris became, after the war, another emblem of French national identity,[36] but this image of catastrophe and flight can be more directly related to the homelessness that is the immediate consequence of ethnic-nationalist aggressions everywhere. Berger's Ways of Seeing closed with its own superimposition of images advertising commodities with those showing the horrors of a refugee camp. The image of the displaced person on TV, stranded in the interspaces of the global village, reduces TV's promise of universal information exchange to a death's head.

Notes

[1] see The Case of California.
[2] Dialectic of Enlightenment, p. 211.
[3] Ecrits, p. 5.
[4] Walter Benjamin: An Intellectual Biography, p. 190.
[5] Illuminations, p. 258.
[6] Illuminations, p. 18.
[7] Walter Benjamin, "The Author as Producer" Art after Modernism: Rethinking Representation, ed. Brain Wallis (New York: New Museum of Contemporary Art, 1984) p. 306.
[8] Illuminations, p. 231.
[9] Illuminations, p. 133.
[10] Terry Eagleton, Walter Benjamin or Toward a Revolutionary Criticism (London: Verso, 1981).
[11] Illuminations, p. 13.
[12] Walter Benjamin, The Origin of German Tragic Drama, trans. John Osborne (London: Verso, 1977) p. 15.
[13] Yet even in the introduction to Benjamin by Frederic Jameson in Marxism and Form: Twentieth Century Dialectical Theories of Literature (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971) had emphasized Benjamin's melancholy. What is striking about this early portrait of Benjamin by Jameson is its *psychological* emphasis: "private depressions, professional discouragement, the dejection of the outsider, distress in the face of political and historical nightmare" (60); and even "psychological obsession" (82). In a more

novelistic mode, Buck-Morss speculates in The Dialectics of Seeing: "Why was there not more of Jack Reed in this man's character . . . ? (32)

[14] Illuminations, p. 226.

[15] A haunting image, not discussed by Sontag, of Benjamin is the miniature portrait that appears, postage stamp size, on his "reader's card for the Bibliotheque Nationale, dated 11 January 1940"--the portrait of a man about to disappear; in this example the library card becomes a death's-head that emblematizes the cataclysm that followed; see Walter Benjamin: An Intellectual Biography, p. 200.

[16] Hannah Arendt, The Jew as Pariah: Jewish Identity and Politics in the Modern Age, ed. Ron H. Feldman (New York: Grove, 1978) p. 66.

[17] George Steiner, Extra-Territorial: Papers on the Literature and Language Revolution (New York: Atheneum, 1971).

[18] Terry Eagleton, Exiles and Emigres: Studies in Modern Literature (New York: Schocken, 1970).

[19] Sigmund Freud, The Ego and the Id, trans. Joan Riviere, ed. James Strachey (New York: Norton, 1960) p. 19.

[20] Walter Benjamin or Toward a Revolutionary Criticism, (preface).

[21] Dialectics of Seeing, p. 15.

[22] Anthony Heilbut explains that emigre intellectuals in America learned that their social eccentricity could turn into an easiest when seen in terms of "personality"--unfortunately the trade-off soon became transparent as a denial of actual individuality, see Exiled in Paradise: German Refugee Artists and Intellectuals in America, from the 1930s to the Present (New York: Viking, 1983) pp. 59-60.

[23] Hannah Arendt, Origins of Totalitarianism (Cleveland & New York: Meridian, 1958) p. 67.

[24] This translation is noted by Richard Collins, "Casablanca: An Analysis of the Film," Casablanca: Script and Legend, p. 235.

[25] Robert B. Ray, A Certain Tendency of the Hollywood Cinema, 1930-1980 (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1985) pp. 55-69.

[26] Charles Baudelaire, p.79.

[27] Walter Benjamin, "N [Re The Theory of Knowledge, Theory of Progress" in Gary Smith (ed), Benjamin: Philosophy, History, Aesthetics (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989) p. 47.

[28] "Casablanca," p. 254.

[29] see Aljean Harmetz, Round Up the Usual Suspects: The Making of *Casablanca*--Bogart, Bergman, and World War II (New York: Hyperion, 1992) p. 212.

[30] A Certain Tendency, p. 27.

[31] In conversation with Aljean Harmetz, cited in Round Up the Usual Suspects, p. 225.
[32] Exiled in Paradise, p. 49.
[33] see Exiled in Paradise, p. 285.
[34] Childhood and Society, p. 255.
[35] One Way Street, p. 313.
[36] Elias Canetti, Crowds and Power, trans. Carol Stewart (New York: Seabury, 1978) p. 55.

CHAPTER 4
OPEN CITIES

Scholars of early cinema have drawn attention to the gradual process by which the camera was directed toward the task of navigating the world and creating an illusion of movement through filmic space. According to Noel Burch, the Institutional Mode of Representation (for which the prototype is Hollywood) interpolates us as ideological subjects through the diegetic effect of the "motionless voyage," identifying our point of view with the camera as serene possessor of all it surveys.[1] Our ideal positioning in this space, that substitutes for tactile substance with visible surface, is the further realization of what Benjamin noted in the "Work of Art" essay as "the desire of the contemporary masses to bring things 'closer' spatially and humanly, which is just as ardent as their bent toward overcoming the uniqueness of every reality by accepting its reproduction." [2] The close relationship that Burch traces between the simultaneous development of motion pictures and railways, from Lumiere's first images of a train arriving at a station, in which the frame is static, to Edwin Porter's Great Train Robbery, in which the camera is mounted on board a moving carriage, shows the deep complicity of filmic technologies with the appropriation of territory by the traveling eye. Hale's

Tours soon simulated the experience of a railway journey for entertainment at International Expositions by using footage shot from a moving train to create a "window on the world" effect.[3]

These special effects were very popular, as were the early "panorama" films for which, in Tom Gunning's words: "Cameras were catapulted into space by means of subway cars, freight trains, aerial balloons, street cars, gondolas, and the moving boardwalk." [4] Benjamin discovered the "ur-form" of these travel simulations in Daguerre's Diorama with its illusions of landscapes transformed by shifting light and other artificial effects. The appetite for travel literature in the age of colonization prefigured these developments, the simulated experience removing the very real threats posed by foreign lands and peoples. Noting that the world does not always passively submit to the imperial gaze, Edward Said reminds us that the eye that administered the colonies did not prevent the reverse motion of the "voyage in" that placed new varieties of foreigners, immigrants, and displaced persons at the metropolitan centers of imperial power.[5] The target of the early cinema apparatus was "the military-industrial proletariat, which was calmly summoned to factory and battlefield at a time when the 'Bolshevik threat' stretched from Munich to the gates of India." [6] This audience of recently displaced and urbanized persons was successfully interpolated as "the cinema gratified the wish of migrant workers for a lasting and even eternal homeland" (39). The

displaced masses received the industrial image as a substitute for the "uniqueness and permanence" [7] of the aura and the homeland, and the threat of communism was defeated:

> The cinema auditorium would not be a new city agera for the living where immigrants from the whole world might gather and communicate with one another; it was much more of a cenotaph, and the essential capacity of cinema in its huge temples was to shape society by putting order into visual chaos.[8]

The return of tribalism that McLuhan explained by the advent of electronic media, can be related to this reconstruction of community around an industrial age monument to the dead. The initial panic reaction that had audiences flee Lumiere's first simulation of an approaching train "did not disappear but simply became more pernicious as the audience learned to control its nervous reactions and to find death amusing." [9] The new tolerance for images of mass death--from which, in the electronic age, there remains virtually no escape--has the consequence of quickly undermining existing cultural traditions (40).

With TV the cinematic death-cult of industrial and urban modernity penetrates the suburban home. Just as the displaced proletarian populations of the metropolis provided the "ground" for the emergence of cinema (the Lumieres made the workers leaving their own factory the subject of the first film: the industrial masses to become both object and consumer in the economy of the image), the migration to the suburbs in post-war America created a fertile landscape for televisual imperialism. Social atomization and the low

density distribution of population was accompanied by a high density of visual information: an implosion of the world. TV extended the motionless voyage by having it arrive within the domestic space:

> the ideological harmony between technological utopias and housing utopias created an ideal nesting ground for television's introduction to the public in the postwar years. Women's home magazines often displayed television sets in decorative settings which created the illusion of spatial conquests. The set was typically placed in rooms with panoramic window views, or else installed next to globes and colorful maps. The image of television as a "global village" . . . was already suggested in the popular discourses of the postwar period.[10]

The mobilization of the industrial masses by congregation in the cinema palaces and amusement parks of the metropolis gives way to a more pervasive simulation of the social with the televisual spectacle of "liveness"--the always available world of others mediated by an electronic screen. Benjamin had noted a prototype of this spatial separateness accompanied by simulation of presence in his 1935 expose of the Arcades Project. In the section that discussed the installation of the bourgeois interior, Benjamin described how the private citizen learned to separate both social and business concerns from his domestic life through the different spaces of home and office: in the office social reality would be managed through business; in the home the "phantasmagorias of the interior" insulated the citizen through the display of private possessions. The interior "represented the universe for the private citizen. In it he assembled the distant in space and time. His drawing-room

was a box in the world theater." [11] Less than a hundred years later, this private/public distinction invented by the bourgeoisie transforms in the culture of cold-war suburbia, when TV becomes the agent that takes the domestic population as its object of commercial exchange; as Robert C. Allen puts it: "television is in the business of selling people to advertisers." [12]

Dreams

Is TV redeemable? Beginning with Adorno's famous disagreement with Benjamin (and continuing in Jean Baudrillard's response to Hans Enzensberger[13]), critical theory has moved between the alternatives of a populist utopianism and a disdain for mass culture that diagnoses populism on the part of the critic as delusory wish-fulfillment. Psychoanalysis provides one account of the dilemma of contemporary criticism: TV finds the subject at home narcissistically attached to a simulacrum of the family scene, while critical theory, deprived of an resident superego to collaborate with its negative evaluations of media culture, is "homeless."

Benjamin's study of Baudelaire and nineteenth century Paris focused on the identifiable stereotypes of the emergent modern metropolis in order to read the historical text discernible in the popular imagery of the day. It was the inevitable way in which these images dated and became instantly archaic that Benjamin saw both the manifestation of

capitalism's restless drive and the potential for the mobilization of spaces and experiences to counter its relentless force: for it was in their ruined form as commodities that Benjamin perceived the once utopian desires that had been sacrificed to the ideology of progress. For example, as Buck-Morss explains: "If the flaneur has disappeared as a specific figure, it is because the perceptible attitude which he embodied saturates modern existence." [14] The heroism of the flaneur is a lost cause insofar as we have all been reduced to the consumers and the consumed. And yet the fantasy of the "superior" and disengaged eye of the flaneur remains a dream of a lost freedom. The flaneur practiced the archaic, "polite" distance and disdain for the crowd even as he was overtaken by it. Separation was transformed from a social privilege--critical distance, the posture required for participation in the public sphere--into a mode of conformity and alienation. The process that Benjamin saw by which the intelligentsia came into the market place not "As they thought, to observe it--but in reality . . . to find a buyer" [15] continues as commodification becomes also the fate of criticism in the age of TV.

On TV the terror experienced in other countries or other parts of town is toured by the distracted viewer as an irredeemable ghost world. In a cultural situation in which we have all been multiplied and displaced (some more painfully than others), like the flaneur in the metropolitan

crowd we learn the pleasures (and terrors) of immersion and disappearance in the TV image.

While Benjamin looked for the seeds of revolution in the collective fantasy of a classless society in a "primal past," [16] Adorno took a more skeptical view when he wrote, in a letter to Benjamin, that "It should be a clear and sufficient warning that in a dreaming collective no differences remain between classes." [17] The erasure of social difference that for Benjamin evoked a Messianic hope was for Adorno another symptom of bourgeois false consciousness. The fact that McLuhan's utopian proclamations of a "global village" were preceded by popular discourses in commercial publications offers a clear case study of the continuing pertinence of Benjamin and Adorno's dispute. The avant-garde has often played the role of also pursuing collective dream images in the arena of cultural invention. In the 1960s the New Left responded enthusiastically to what were seen as the liberatory possibilities of Pop Art and subculture.[18] Pop seemed to challenge the hegemony of the high culture that remained the refuge of the Frankfurt School after its totalizing analysis of the "American" culture industry. Since then, various forms of subculture theory and community activism have attempted to discover signs of a utopianism that continues to exceed the supposed dead-end domination of TV culture.

Before TV was first harnessed, by the Nazis, to the machinery of the totalitarian state, avant-garde groups

dreamed of a different televisual future. In 1929, a Soviet sociologist sympathetic to the Constructivist movement, Mikhail Okhitovich, envisioned a future city of fully mobilized citizens: "The rapid growth in the means of communication and mechanical transport is everyday diminishing the extent to which a man's life is rooted and centered in a fixed dwelling." [19] Long before American suburbia, Okhitovich dreamed of "The Red City of the Planet of Communism" that would be arrived at through a process of "Disurbanisation." The urban style based in "rectangular, box-like forms" (18) was a product of the first industrial era, to be replaced by the dematerialized power of the electronic. A model of containment gives way to one of flow. In contrast to the "solution" of American suburbia to the problem of the urban masses--that re-runs the phantasmagorias of the bourgeois interior as televisual spectacle--Okhitovich speaks of an end to the "home" altogether: "Only prefabricated, demountable, changeable buildings will answer the needs of developed man" (18). This projection of the Soviet avant-garde finds one realization in the American dream of the mobile home (just as MTV is postmodern America's answer to Soviet montage) and others in the conceptual nomadology of Deleuze and Guattari or the New Urbanism of the Situationists (itself an avant-garde extension of Fourier's phalanstries, or a kind of anti-Disneyland). When people need no longer gather together in fixed dwellings because their technology is no longer based in the consumption of

fuel but the transmission of energy and "Distance is now measured by time" (16), then culture begins to assume its televisual forms.

Interzones

Benjamin was interested in those utopian wishes for a conflict-free society whose ruined form could be perceived in the commodity culture that surrounds us. In the case of television, such a wish is the "global village." Michel Foucault has distinguished between utopias--"fundamentally unreal spaces"--and *heterotopias*: sites that are "outside of all places, even though it may be possible to indicate their location in reality." [20] For example, the mirror is an unreal space insofar as it creates the illusion of a virtual reality; but it is a heterotopia insofar as it is both real and transforms, or inverts, one's perceptions of real space. Another example given by Foucault is the cemetery, which is gradually removed from "the sacred and immortal heart of the city" and banished to the suburbs (25). The long history of the cemetery resembles the very brief history of the cinema (which, in certain respects, function as a cemetery), that we have traced from its monumental function in the industrial metropolis to its suburban form in TV:

> Basically it was quite natural that, in a time of real belief in the resurrection of bodies and the immortality of the soul, overriding importance was not accorded to the body's remains. On the contrary, from the moment when people are no longer sure that they have a soul or that the body will regain life, it is perhaps necessary to give much more attention to the dead body, which is

> ultimately the only trace of our existence in the world and in language. In any case, it is from the beginning of the nineteenth century that everyone has the right to her or his own little box for her or his own little personal decay . . . (25)

The historian who provides a detailed history of Western death, Philippe Aries, writes of the period "During the Middle Ages and until well into the seventeenth century" when the cemetery, "together with the church, was the center of social life." [21] So much was the cemetery once a public space that Aries can ask: "Was it the cemetery or the cloister that provided the model for the square or rectangular park flanked by shopping arcades . . ?" (71). While during that long period of human history people saw fit to "stroll, socialize, and assemble" (64) among the anonymous dead, the cinematic Frankensteinian ideology has given expression to the modern cult of the individual and the denial of death.

Foucault does not mention television, but lists its precursors--the theater and the cinema--as heterotopias, alongside museums and libraries as places where our experience of time is transformed:

> the idea of accumulating everything, of establishing a sort of general archive, the will to enclose in one place all times, all epochs, all forms, all tastes, the idea of constituting a place of all times that is itself outside of time and inaccessible to its ravages, the project of organizing in this way a sort of perpetual and indefinite accumulation of time in an immobile place, this whole idea belongs to our modernity. (26)

Now we know, just as cinema gave way to television, the "immobile place" of the library or the museum is transforming into the mobile information potentially available to the

possessor of the home computer. The screen re-places all time and space in a continual dispersion of an infinite accumulation. In contrast to the static, material accumulation of the library, the museum, or cemetery, Foucault turns to the festival as the "fleeting, transitory, precarious" embodiment of the heterotopic.

In the Middle Ages, the living mixed freely with the dead in the public charnel houses, undisturbed by the stray bones and skulls (Hamlet's "poor Yorick") of the anonymous dead that accompanied their social interactions. Such encounters between the dead and the living were supported by a confidence that all would be set right on judgment day: the doctrine of the resurrection made individual death assimilable by a communal consciousness. In the nineteenth century, Marx and Engels evoked the resurrection of the masses in their call for revolutionary communism--"A specter is haunting Europe"--with a new, desperate faith that the cause of the dead was not lost. With the creation of the industrial proletariat the bourgeoisie "produces . . . its own gravediggers." [22] The post-war America of suburbia and television has seen the increasing disappearance of the masses as an historical agent. From the spectacle of the urban masses in the age of cinema--from Griffith to Eisenstein and Reifensthal--TV emerges along with social atomization following the model of the superhighway. The becoming-electronic of all culture inverts the Medieval centrality of death to life in a diffusion and denial of

death that threatens the deadening of all life: no festivals. Mourning demands a staging of a heterotopia in which the dead return to play among the living and are then sent on according to the boundaries of sacred protocol. When the dead are *permanently on hold*, always ready on demand, under control, user-friendly, then mourning is blocked and a sense of history disappears.

For the purposes of my discussion, Walter Benjamin marks the passages between the various heterotopias mentioned by Foucault--notably the cinema, the library and shopping arcades as well as, by implication, TV. A further list of heterotopias might include all of those sacred and secret societies inquired into by Bataille and his associates, of which the College of Sociology itself was an example. The experiments of Bataille's groups in the ethnographic museum can be placed alongside Benjamin's Arcades Project as examples of a surrealist scholarship that attempts to subvert the drive to amass the plunder of the world in an encyclopedic archive. As this archive goes electronic and becomes a decentralized, all pervasive other dimension of information, the counter strategies of the avant-garde have also entered the general realm of information practice.

While Benjamin aligned his interest in utopian wish-images with a revolutionary politics, Foucault's notion of a heterotopia is helpful in relating the goals of the Arcades Project to televisual mediascapes. Without forgetting the hope of social regeneration, the notion of a heterotopia

alerts us to the entire range of possible transformations staged in the simulated public realms of which the Paris Arcades are an early example. To discern the specific shape of any heterotopia is to begin to understand something fundamental about any culture, particularly--as has been my concern so far--through the question of collective mourning and commemoration.

Foucault writes elsewhere of "the discovery of a new imaginative space in the nineteenth century":[23] the library. For Foucault the mimetic compulsion that underlies, as it does for Lacan, the positioning of the subject in an imaginary space is to be understood historically in its relation to various technologies and their related institutions. Modernism in the arts, Foucault reminds us, is a possibility of cultural institutions; archives that opened themselves to the invention of new spaces. For Foucault an archive is not defined by the objects it contains but by the "set of rules" that places limits on the possible statements that can legitimately be made in relation to it. The archive defines which statements are preserved, what kinds of operations can be performed on them, and who has access to them. It became the role of the avant-garde to explore those limits and to produce new hybrid statements that redefined archival institutions. The first French avant-garde, the Impressionists, scandalized the academy; but the paintings of Manet would have been impossible without the existence of the Louvre to provide a stock of images that could be quoted,

alluded to, parodied, re-presented in new contexts for deliberate effect.

Benjamin's perception of the relation between allegory and montage provides one of the key insights into modernity. The allegorical gaze describes the Imaginary in its textual dimensions: to write is to *become*, textually--to discover the self, by detour, in the materiality of documents. Virgil's Aneid had traveled through the world of the dead as a part of his epic journey leading to the founding of Rome. As Dante had found Virgil, Benjamin took Baudelaire as his guide through Paris. As Lacan explained it, Hell is a retroactive fantasy of the body in ruins that haunts the myth of the unified self.[24] The traditional poetic evocation of Hell became, in the experiments of the avant-garde, a deconstruction of the figure/ground opposition. The immersion of the scholar in the private library was for Benjamin analogous to the Surrealists' explorations of the massive archive of Paris.

Benjamin was convinced that even the dead were not safe from continued servitude to the enemy in the mystification of the past. With a similar conviction Bataille lead his own avant-garde group into a critique of the ethnographic museum. Bataille's journal Documents, which appeared during 1929 and 1930, was an experimental text composed of fragments ranging over a variety of topics, including modern art, ethnographic objects, religious subjects as well as contemporary popular culture. Documents is culture as collage: full of shocks,

juxtapositions and collisions. Ex-members of the Surrealist movement, the contributors to Documents had a taste for the exotic and the primitive, as well as for Hollywood cinema and "low" forms of entertainment and spectacle. Documents collapses distinctions between high and low culture, theorizing instead the entire social scene, turning the gaze of the ethnographer back on Western culture which is shown to include practices as bizarre as any previously acceptable object of study.[25]

Buck-Morss distinguishes Benjamin's relation to archaic forms from Marx's critical evaluations of popular consciousness in The Eighteenth Brumaire. Benjamin looks to a "collective imagination" that has "developed *not* by 'burying' the dead past, but by revitalizing it"; for "where else *but* to the dead past can imagination turn in order to conceptualize a world that is 'not yet'?" [26] The logic of Buck-Morss's interpretation of Benjamin can also be applied to the problematic relation of Bataille's groups to the ethnographic other.

The main site for ethnographic-Surrealist activity was the Trocadero museum--organized by Georges-Henri Riviere, a friend of Bataille and a contributor to Documents--which, along with the flea-market, offered some of the most fortuitous possibilities of discovery to the Surrealist flaneur: it was at the Trocadero that Picasso began to study *l'art negre*. James Clifford describes the Trocadero as "a jumble of exotica" (135) before Riviere began to organize

exhibitions there. But the Trocadero never became wholly "scientific"--rather, it came to embody the sensibility of the avant-garde and the fashionable Parisian interest in the *sauvage*: jazz, African art, Josephine Baker etc. Yet if there was a strong element of fantasy in this mix of ethnography and aestheticism, its effects also included a radical disruption of conventional representations of the human: in Picasso's figures influenced by African art, in Bataille's studies of freaks, in Surrealist photographic distortions of the nude we can see a decomposition--a *logic of disintegration*--of the subject as a construction of the dominant ideologies of Western culture. Clifford comments: "If the notion of the African 'fetish' had any meaning in the twenties, it described not a mode of African belief but rather the way in which exotic artifacts were consumed by European aficionados" (136). Bataille's groups can be seen as having approached this fetishization in a comparable mode to Benjamin's conversion of commodity fetishism toward the ends of the dialectical image.

Close-Ups

Umberto Eco describes the heterotopia of Rick's *Cafe Americain* as containing the "paraphernalia of at least ten exotic genres":

> The interior: Foreign Legion (each character has a different nationality and a different story to tell, and also his own skeleton in the closet), Grand Hotel (people come and people go, and nothing ever happens), Mississippi River Boat, New Orleans Brothel (Black piano

> player), the Gambling Inferno in Macao or Singapore (with Chinese women), the Smuggler's Paradise, the Last Outpost on the Edge of the desert.[27]

So did Hollywood contain the cosmopolitan heterogeneity of the mid-twentieth-century. The cinema provides its own Trocaderos (as the Surrealists always knew), its horde of displaced persons and objects, its jumble of cultural codes, its complex phantasmagoria.

Initiating a process of mourning in the video medium, Jean-Luc Godard's Histoire(s) du Cinema plays with images of the twentieth century in film, oscillating, superimposing, fragmenting, re-running and slowing down, allowing the viewer to attend to previously imperceptible details and be shocked into recognition by new juxtapositions. Godard gives an impressive demonstration of what Benjamin called the "optical unconscious" and reminds us that his own memory theater has its origins in the world's first film library, the Cinematheque Francaise of Henri Langlois. Langlois emerged out of the same cultural situation that produced Bataille's Documents; he was one of the earliest and most passionate collectors of film and was interested in neither aesthetic hierarchy nor historicism. Like Riviere at the Trocadero, Langlois displayed his collection in ways that were possible only before the imposition of taxonomies that would later become institutionalized Truth. Langlois was, to use Levi-Strauss's term, a *bricoleur*--projecting fabulous montages, improvising, creating juxtapositions. At Godard would later pay tribute to it: "This is why the Cinematheque is so good,

because there one sees films pell-mell, a 1939 Cukor alongside a 1918 documentary." [28]

The Cinematheque was a unique archive at the time it was frequented by those who would become writers for the Cahiers du Cinema and later the directors of the New Wave. In the Cinematheque could be discovered not only the classic works of American, European, and Japanese directors, but also Hollywood B Movies, the popular genres, as well as the artifacts of primitive cinema and documentary material. All of these films could be regarded purely as *documents*, before they were artistic achievements or classifiable examples: free of critical analysis, they were open to multiple possibilities of understanding and inventive extrapolation. Like Picasso, who discovered *l'art negre* at the Trocadero, Godard discovered exotic gangster movies at the Cinematheque. Like Picasso, who drew from Cezanne's exploration of surface and light to combine it with the styles of African masks, Godard invented from the similarities he noted between Italian Neo-Realism and American *film noir*. It was in these undecideable interzones of the filmic text--the zones where Lukacher situates the primal scene and Barthes discovers his third meanings, or where fiction cannot be distinguished from documentary--that Godard returned film to its original status of an "attraction": "just an image." Cinematography is rediscovered by Godard through a magnification and expansion of a seam joining two images or representational modes and dissolving their differences in a third, invented space:

montage as intertextual mimicry. In this Godard, like Langlois, had immediate precursors in the avant-garde.

The French New Wave began by attacking the dominant literary quality of French cinema. Tom Gunning comments: "the history of early cinema, like the history of cinema generally, has been written and theorized under the hegemony of narrative films";[29] but in early film making, for example in the works of Melies, narrative mainly provided an excuse to explore the possibilities of the new medium. The same can be said of Godard, who used narrative as a loose, adaptable structure organizing an assemblage of framing, cutting, and shooting that persistently defied the dominant commercial mode of the continuity style.

Godard was trained as an ethnologist and his cinema gaze strayed over diverse objects and activities in everyday life. Now Godard mourns the passing of cinema in the age of television in a way that recalls Baudelaire's ambivalence toward photography. Benjamin notes how Baudelaire saw photographs reducing "the scope for the play of the imagination." [30] The continuing decay of the aura since photography first assailed the sublimated domains of art (as secular art had once overtaken religion) has once again become manifest in the transition from film culture--with its depth of focus, its rich chiaroscuro, detailed surface, rituals of reception and monumental function--to video as always-available ("prostituted") poor relation. Just as "the camera records our likeness without returning our gaze," [31]

videotape presents a new black hole into which the social begins to disappear--the "home video" is the detour by which intimacy is increasingly diverted. Benjamin cites Baudelaire: "I long for the return of the dioramas whose enormous, crude magic subjects me to the spell of a useful illusion" (151)--such is the current fate of the cinephile. The stillness of the simulated landscape in the Diorama no doubt left a space for the daydreams that restore a sense of the security of infancy under the benevolent gaze of the mother; while photography disrupted this relative stability and duration with its fragments of space/time. These archaic forms of representation *within* the advance of modernity take on significance relative to the gaze informed by the bodies cultural memory and experience.

The cult movie also attracts a mournful, nostalgic gaze: Casablanca could serve as the name for a death cult. By learning from the cult movie and the collective practices of celebration it supports, we can rediscover some of the heterogeneity contained by a cultural monument. By a logic analogous to Freud's theory of dreams, a principle of condensation is at work that offers itself to the construction of counter-histories.

Missing Persons

In 1931 Andre Breton and Paul Eluard conducted a questionnaire in the journal Minotaure: "Can you tell us what was the decisive encounter of your life? To what degree did

this encounter give--does it give--the impression of the fortuitous, of the necessary?" [32] The encounters around which we retrospectively organize experiences into correspondences, similarities, repetitions, patterns, directions, regions, and eras, can become research strategies by which to draw on unconscious desire. The following story can serve as an example: Ingrid Bergman first saw Open City in New York in 1947 and was so moved by the film that she wrote to Roberto Rossellini offering her services to him as an actress. There were a number of complications involving the arrival of the letter, but Rossellini eventually received it and responded immediately with an invitation to come to work with him. Bergman subsequently became the star of several Rossellini films and also the director's wife. What did Bergman see in Open City that would lead her to abandon her career in Hollywood? Slavoj Zizek notes that in Open City "the two central characters, the lesbian Nazi and the Gestapo torturer, were named *Ingrid* and *Bergman*." [33] The film includes many sequences of striking impact: for instance the one in which the heroine falls dead in the street after being shot by a soldier. This image has the documentary quality that made the film "revolutionary" in style and was to be imitated in the early films of Godard. The romance between Bergman and Rossellini serves as a literal connection between the cinematic worlds of Hollywood and Europe to be developed in the infatuation of the directors and critics of the French New Wave with American films and stars.

The anecdote is also an illustration of an electronically mediated encounter that exceeds and displaces the boundaries imposed by nation states: such informational and human passage points to what is at stake in the politics of global television. Today the maintenance of a national identity is to a great degree dependent on the control of a televisual image economy threatened by the "imperialism" of global corporate interests (so the French government attempted to keep Dallas off their screens) or by subcultural mimicry of "pernicious" cultural influences (so the middle class once saw Elvis Presley)--although these "threats" often mask deeper alliances. The televisual image both calls upon and conceals actual human migrations.

Rossellini, learning that Bergman was the most popular actress in Hollywood (the only-unfavourable impression he had had of her was by chance when he had taken refuge in a cinema during a bombing raid), wrote back to her recounting a story: some time earlier he had been traveling in a region north of Rome and caught sight of a group of refugee women held in an internment camp:

> At the further end of the field, behind the barbed wires, far away from the others, a woman was looking at me, alone, fair, all dressed in black. Heeding not the calls of the guards, I drew nearer. She only knew a few words of Italian and as she pronounced them, the very effect gave a rosy tint to her cheeks. She was from Latvia. In her clear eyes, one could read a mute intense despair. I put my hand through the barbed wires and she seized my arm, just like a shipwrecked person would clutch at a floating board. The guard drew near, quite menacing. I got back to my car.[34]

Haunted by the memory of this woman, Rossellini later returns to the camp, but she has escaped. Rossellini then proposes that Bergman come with him to look for this missing woman and visualize together her subsequent life. The results of this proposal was the first of the films Rossellini made with Bergman: Stromboli (the name of the Italian village where the Latvian woman later settled with her soldier husband).

Breton introduces himself to the stranger, Nadja, in a Paris street, drawn to her by an extraordinary quality in her eyes. Buck-Morss, in The Dialectics of Seeing, recounts a similar first encounter, on the piazza in Capri, between Walter Benjamin and the Latvian activist Asja Lacis. Among the consequences of the very different romances that eventuated from these love meetings are two experimental texts: Breton's Nadja and Benjamin's One Way Street, both published in 1928. Buck-Morss sees Lacis as a radical force in Benjamin's life attracting him away from academia. For Breton, Nadja leads the way to a revolution in everyday life. Nadja is a transient from the provinces, both Lacis and Benjamin were emigres: these recognitions take place in the city among crowds of faces never to be seen again.

In his 1929 essay on Surrealism, Benjamin had compared the Surrealist conception of love to that of Provencal love poetry, drawing on Erich Auerbach's (then recent) study Dante: Poet of the Secular World. In Benjamin's essay the "mystical beloved" of the medieval poet becomes the "telepathic girl" for the Surrealist Breton. And yet, "The

lady, in esoteric love, matters least. So, too, for Breton. He is closer to the things that Nadja is close to than to her." [35] Nadja is not simply the image of the beloved (her portrait is not included in the illustrations to Nadja) but a new way of experiencing Paris.

Nadja "enjoyed imagining herself as a butterfly whose body consisted of a Mazda (Nadja) bulb." [36] Nadja's association with the electric light calls upon popular imagery of "electric girls" at the end of the previous century.[37] Edison's electric light invention, that had driven the extension of commodity spectacle, is metamorphosed for Breton through Nadja's dream image:"(and now I am disturbed when I pass the luminous Mazda sign on the main boulevards . . .)"(129). McLuhan was to make the electric light his example of "pure information" [38] --Nadja/Mazda functions as a medium transforming the experience of time and space, a mimetic principal that collapses distinctions of form and content into a single surface of electronic immersion: "For it is not till the electric light is used to spell out some brand name that it is noticed as a medium"(9).[39] The uncanny return of the commodity in the Surrealist voyage diverts the flow of capital into an alienation-effect illuminated by those forces that had remained invisible but panoptical: "The message of the electric light is like the message of electric power in industry, totally radical, pervasive, and decentralized"(9). The Surrealist image mirrors the strategy

of the advertiser who had begun to colonize public space with electronic information:

> Commercial light is to police light what bourgeois society is to the state. As the state, in its appropriately named "night-watchman" function, guarantees the security that bourgeois society needs to pursue its business interests, so public lighting creates the framework of security within which commercial lighting can unfold. When shop lights go out after business hours, the light of the street lanterns, whose weak glimmer was drowned in the sea of advertising lights, becomes visible again and the lanterns go into action as the guardians of order that they have always been.[40]

In Benjamin's historiography the shop window display would serve as the model for a frozen tableau and the mnemonic effect of the shock encounter.

In a discussion of a Baudelaire poem, "A une passante," the form of the lyric is shown to contain the analytic force of the detective story. One of the earliest examples of the detective genre, Poe's "Mystery of Marie Roget," concerns the disappearance and murder of a young woman whom no-one reports seeing on the street after she leaves her Paris apartment. The fascination of the story rests on those new forms of anxiety about anonymity peculiar to the modern metropolitan experience. Benjamin shows how Baudelaire's lyric, relating the fleeting sight of a woman in the street before she is engulfed by the crowd, works with the another dimension of this excitement: "Far from eluding the erotic in the crowd, the apparition which fascinates him is brought to him by this very crowd. The delight of the city-dweller is not so much love at first sight as love at last sight." [41]

The disappearance of Marie Roget touches on what Michael Taussig calls the "Space of Death": the realm of lost souls who continue to trouble collective memory and to subvert official histories, of the anonymous dead of colonized and exterminated peoples who appear as ghosts haunting the popular imagination. These ghosts of folklore are often children who have died, or victims of murders, those whose violent deaths leave a sense of unresolved trauma.[42] The murder of Marie Roget is troubling because it is a consequence of the new anonymity that is possible in the modern city, where a girl can disappear because no-one remembers passing her in the street. The logic of this modern anonymity leads in one direction to the Nazi death camps. The emergence of Marie Roget's drowned body from the Seine potentially alerts us to the logistics of tracing and surveillance in a metropolitan culture as well as throws into question bourgeois conceptions of identity and recognition of individual subjecthood. The girl's body becomes a site where the perils of modernization become evidence.

Nadja tells Breton: "I am the soul in limbo," [43] reminding us that she belongs with all of those missing or displaced persons who have passed through the looking glass to inhabit a space of disappearance in official histories, but who return as both the lost children of fairy tales and the angels who guide them safely home; like Nadja, who sits among the workers traveling home in the Metro "and tries to detect what they are thinking about" (25). Nadja inhabits

Paris like a ghost. Likewise Bergman, in Rossellini's Voyage in Italy, would tour ruins and cemeteries and the archetypal catastrophic site: Pompei. Lacis would introduce Benjamin to Moscow through the eyes of its streetkids.

There is a piece by Michel Leiris in Documents that also works with the image of the girl of the streets as a waif, the "Little Match Girl" who recalls for Leiris De Quincey's lost love, Ann of Oxford Street, but who appears in the guise of a showgirl in the Fox Follies "whose double passes, as if by magic, through the shop window to don a luxurious nightgown." [44] Like Benjamin's dialectical images, this paradoxical figure appears to Leiris as a popular icon, a prostituted commodity and an hallucinatory vision: the reified form that arises in the collective dream-world of entertainment as a symptom of an experience of loss that remains unconscious. The task that Benjamin saw for the critic, having learned from Surrealism, was not to denounce the popular as much as to submerge oneself in its images to the point where their fantastic quality began to manifest the energies repressed by the political system, and then to put those energies to new ends.

The poetic quest by which the poet Breton makes Nadja his Beatrice leads him on a journey through a ghost world which, unlike the Hell of Christian memory theaters, does not reveal a moral hierarchy but the new mode of a reified urban experience where one encounters the undead commodity in the "*profane illumination*." [45] "Who am I? If this once I were to

rely on a proverb, then perhaps everything would amount to knowing whom I 'haunt'" [46] --the world of Nadja is mournful as well as marvelous. Paris is presented as a series of *loci* with its deserted looking cafes and restaurants, shopfronts on empty streets, hotels where a brief encounter might take place--all suggesting transient moments and situations. Photos taken at dawn reveal metropolitan locations without their passing crowds; one or two distant figures wander near monuments of almost Egyptian scale and stillness (the way Paris must have looked just prior to the German occupation). Breton discovers a beauty that is "neither dynamic nor static" (159) but because it is *going nowhere* opens the monumental forms taken by the myth of progress to startling collisions with everyday life. Breton found such illuminations in the industrial and electronic as new modes of experience:

> Beauty is like a train that ceaselessly roars out of Gare de Lyon and which I know will never leave, which has not left. It consists of jolts and shocks, many of which do not have much importance, but which we know are destined to produce one *shock*, which does. (159-160)

This train recalls the first cinematic spectacle of the Lumiere brothers' "Train arriving at La Ciotat," as Breton seeks to extend the impact it first had on audiences who fled the theater as the simulated vehicle approached them head on. In the shock tactics of Surrealist montage Benjamin found an attempt to respond in a revolutionary fashion to the impact of the modern urban scene, extending Baudelaire's visions and dandyism as well as the Freudian unconscious to refashion the

material objects and incidents of everyday life under capitalism. To walk through this hallucinatory landscape would be to recover those "memory images deposited in limbs" and unlock their power to alter accepted perceptions of social reality--never mind if these images seem "pessimistic" or had the quality of states of intoxication: *all imagery* needed to be directed toward such a critique:

> The collective is a body, too. And the *physis* that is being organized for it in technology can, through all its political and factual reality, only be produced in that image sphere to which profane illumination initiates us. Only when in technology body and image so interpenetrate that all revolutionary tension becomes bodily collective innervation, and all the bodily innervations of the collective become revolutionary discharge, has reality transcended itself to the extent demanded by the Communist Manifesto. [47]

The uncanny return of the object that gave rise to the Surrealist "profane illumination" because it awoke the (revolutionary or reactionary) nostalgia that had become a common experience of modern urban culture. In the yearning for a lost homeland, the displaced person became representative of all the objects that capitalist industrialism and imperialism had rendered "homeless." How could this "ghost," cut off from any locatable social corpus, *re-connect*?

Notes

[1] Life to those Shadows, p. 181.
[2] Illuminations, p. 225.

[3] Despite this emphasis Burch places on the centrality of the diegetic illusion to the IMR, he also notes that contemporary American TV seems to have put this tendency in reverse by regressing to something that resembles the primitive mode in which disengagement and one dimensionality enhances the "*trivialization of everything*," see Life to Those Shadows pp. 261-263. Burch's conclusion is that simulated mobility is not the only, or most effective, mode of ideological interpellation.

[4] Tom Gunning, "An Unseen Energy Swallows Space: The Space in Early Film and Its Relation to American Avant-Garde Film," Film Before Griffith (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983) p. 362.

[5] Edward Said, Culture and Imperialism (London: Chatto and Windus, 1993) p. 261.

[6] War and Cinema, p. 39.

[7] Illuminations, p. 225.

[8] War and Cinema, p. 39.

[9] War and Cinema, p. 40.

[10] Lynn Spigel, "Installing the Television Set: Popular Discourses on Television and Domestic Space, 1948-1955" Camera Obscura 16 1988 p. 17.

[11] Charles Baudelaire, pp. 167-168.

[12] Robert C. Allen (ed.), Channels of Discourse, Reassembled (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1992) p. 18.

[13] see Hans Magnus Enzensberger, "Constituents of a Theory of the Media" and Jean Baudrillard, "Requiem for the Media," both included in Video Culture: A Critical Investigation, ed. John G. Hanhardt (New York: Visual Studies Workshop, 1986).

[14] Susan Buck-Morss, "The Flaneur, the Sandwichman and the Whore" New German Critique 39 Fall 1986 p. 104.

[15] Charles Baudelaire, p. 171.

[16] Charles Baudelaire, p. 159.

[17] Aesthetics and Politics (London: New Left Books, 1977) p. 113.

[18] see Andreas Huyssen, "The Cultural Politics of Pop: Reception and Critique of US Pop Art and the Federal Republic of Germany" New German Critique No. 4 Winter 1975 pp. 77-97.

[19] Catherine Cooke, "Russian Precursors," Deconstruction: Omnibus Volume, eds. Andeas Papadakis, Catherine Cooke & Andrew Benjamin (New York: Rizzoli, 1989) p. 16.

[20] Michel Foucault, "Of Other Spaces" Diacritics Spring 1986 p. 24.

[21] Philippe Aries, The Hour of Our Death, trans. Helen Weaver (New York: Knopf, 1981) p. 62.

[22] Robert C. Tucker (ed.), Marx-Engels Reader (New York: Norton, 1978) p. 483.

[23] Michel Foucault, Language, Counter-Memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews, trans. Donald F. Bouchard and Sherry Simon (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1977) p. 90.
[24] Ecrits, pp. 4-5.
[25] James Clifford, The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth-Century Ethnography, Literature, and Art (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1988), pp. 117-134.
[26] Dialectics of Seeing, p. 124.
[27] "Casablanca," p. 260.
[28] Tom Milner (ed.), Godard on Godard (New York: Da Capo, 1986) p. 223.
[29] Tom Gunning, "Cinema of Attraction: Early Film, Its Spectator and the Avant-Garde," Wide Angle Vol. 8 No 3/4 1986.
[30] Charles Baudelaire, p. 146.
[31] Charles Baudelaire, p. 147.
[32] Maurice Nadeau, History of Surrealism, trans. Richard Howard (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1989) p. 201.
[33] Slavoj Zizek, "Rossellini: Woman as Symptom of Man," October 54 Fall 1990, p. 19.
[34] Cited in Ingrid Bergman and Alan Burgess, Ingrid Bergman: My Story (New York: Delacorte Press, 1980) p. 8.
[35] One Way Street, p. 229.
[36] Andre Breton, Nadia, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Grove Press, 1960) p. 129.
[37] see Carolyn Marvin, When Old Technologies Were New: Thinking about Electric Communication in the Late Nineteenth Century (New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988): William J. Hammer, Edison's talented electrical effects designer, dressed his small daughter May as the "Goddess of Electricity, with tiny Edison lamps in her hair," earrings, breastpin, and a wand tipped with astar containing a tiny lamp, at a lavish New Year's Eve party at his Newark home. (138)
[38] Understanding Media, p. 8.
[39] Marvin comments that electric light was spectacular enough in itself in the late nineteenth century for it to be seen now as a forerunner of TV, see p. 162.
[40] Wolfgang Schivelbusch, Disenchanted Night: The Industrialization of Light in the Nineteenth Century, trans. Angela Davis (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988) pp. 142-143.
[41] Charles Baudelaire, p. 45.
[42] see Michael Taussig, Shamanism, Colonialism, and the Wild Man: A Study in Terror and Healing (Chicago : Chicago University Press, 1987) pp. 371-373.
[43] Nadja, p. 26.

[44] "A Documents Dossier," October Spring 1992 p. 62.
[45] One Way Street, p. 227.
[46] Nadja, p. 11.
[47] One Way Street, p. 239.

CHAPTER 5
VIDEO GAMES

The most explosive social upheavals in the industrialized West since World War II took place in 1968: not only the "events of May" in France, but also the cultural and political revolts in Germany, the USA, and elsewhere. The French film journals, Cahiers du Cinema and Cinethique, that theorized radical film practice and critique in response to May '68 turned to Benjamin and Brecht as precursors.[1] In Germany, Benjamin and Brecht also returned as major figures for the generation of '68, displacing the previously dominant influences of Adorno and Marcuse.[2] Discussing the use of the new video technology to create "guerrilla television," Patricia Mellencamp notes the decisive influence of Illuminations, including Arendt's Introduction.[3] Inheriting the utopian impulse of Vertov's Kino-Eye, video activists staged interventions into a community already deeply penetrated by commercial television. Mellencamp rightly emphasizes the situational element in these interventions, recalling what Benjamin had learned from Asja Lacis's revolutionary theater.

60s video guerillas, however, made the mistake of sharing the same instrumental conception of technology as did their declared enemies: the corporate and military interests

that had manufactured and marketed video in the first place. Questions of institutional and social formations were not adequately theorized (Mellencamp notes especially the question of gender). Since the demise of 1960s-style populism, Benjamin has been aligned to subcultural and feminist theory--becoming, retrospectively, perhaps the first "philosopher as consumer" in a politics of reception, resistance, and counter-production. We need to extend further these scholarly and experimental activities that constellate around Benjamin by becoming aware of the way that authorship and criticism themselves have taken new commodity forms. To write televisually the way that Benjamin internalized the photographic would be to engage in cultural studies not only critically but mimetically with the continual process of recoding and nostalgic reconstruction that characterizes TV's role in the popular imagination.

Benjamin argued in "The Author as Producer" [4] that the challenge that faced the writer in allying himself with social change was best met by becoming an activist *within* his/her own sphere of production. The theorist does not necessarily abandon print for video, but directs theory toward a transformation of the cultural apparatus. In the TV era our residual attachments to the legacy of classical literacy attempt to define themselves amid the general debris left behind by the information explosion. For if the Surrealists constructed their montage from the junk heap of bourgeois culture, we have begun to feed off the garbage

produced by electronic media--no longer simply discarded in the contemporary equivalent of the flea market but increasingly kept available by our proliferating archival institutions, databases and information networks. Preservation performs the operation of an *incorporation* that attempts to neutralize the shock of rapid social change. In this media environment, destructive path-breaking reduces overload by clearing spaces for imaginative play, open narratives, renewed attention and insight.

Conservative cultural critic Neil Postman argues that the passive reception of electronic images corrodes both the active engagement in play characteristic of oral traditions as well as the gradual acquiring of knowledge achieved through the technologies of print literacy.[5] The notion of childhood as embodying innocence, privacy, and dependency that is the invention of the middle class in the age of print is shattered by the intrusion of televisual information into the home. TV makes us all adolescent because--despite the provision of programming directed at children--1. TV makes all its information available to anyone with access to the screen; 2. the image, as opposed to the written text, is almost instantly legible (requires no apprenticeship in reading). TV breaks down the control of information in the bourgeois home and school and subverts its autonomy through broadcasts of corporate capitalist and militarist images of the world.

While Postman's concerns are with the preservation of middle class values, Buck-Morss's reading of Benjamin has reminded us of the important role that the child plays in his writings as a force for social change. The institutionalization of book literacy, while maintaining a state of childhood through separation and a developmental model of learning, has also led to a decline in the mimetic faculty so prominent in cultures based in primary orality. "Children's Literature"--fairy tales, imaginative fiction--and Art provided the marginalized forms for the release of mimetic impulses in industrial bourgeois society. Nevertheless, the simultaneous advent of cinema--with its reinvention of the tactile eye--and the modern rediscovery of the "primitive"--in non-European ethnicities, popular forms like jazz, folk art, etc.,--provided the opportunity for a resurgence of the mimetic into everyday culture.[6]

Festivals of the Electric Body

While the theorists and activists of the 60s set about reviving the experiments of the 20s and 30s that had been given up as lost by the survivors of that era, the new tribalism of electronic psychedelics was also a "happening thing." The Frankfurt School, who had consistently looked to critical reason supported by family privacy, have become identified with Adorno's "notorious" negative evaluation of jazz. Lawrence Rickels repeats the psychoanalytic critique of popular music as regression:

> Group-supported pleasure comes with repetition--with recognition of the tune the second time around. The repeated act of identifying a tune represents a form of mastery interchangeable with that attained through drug use. This music must be taken repeatedly to preserve, as always with drugs, the direct hit--the direct connection with the body.[7]

By this analysis rock n'roll offers a retreat from the individual experience of loss into a collective narcissism. Stanley Arronowitz puts a less disapproving light on the 60s generation's "refusal to work and generate nuclear families because these were the signs of the reassertion of the dominance of time." [8] The rejection of the order of the fathers involved a commitment to "hanging out" that was later given its negative expression in the Punk celebration of boredom. Against the values of age, maturity, but also the ideology of progress was "the alternative of *merging* into a new community as the weapon against death" (197).

Benjamin's final meditations, "Theses on the Philosophy of History," attend to questions of community and sacrifice. The redemption of the dead, through the revolutionary coming of the Messiah, takes place only through the cessation of time: so the French revolutionists fired on the clock towers of Paris. This assault on time is presented by Benjamin in terms of the "spirit of sacrifice" [9] of the proletariat. The abandonment of the working class as the originators of social change by theorists like Marcuse, who forged a temporary alliance with students and the counterculture, provided a new populist alternative to Adorno's "pessimism." However, the

foreclosure of death in festivals of peace and love participated in the perpetual adolescence of TV culture and boosted rather than interrupted the entertainment industry and consumerism.

Asja Lacis's proletarian origins and her revolutionary activism lead to her exile from Stalin's Soviet Union but also inspired a revival of her methods by radical theater groups in West Germany in the late 1960s.[10] Lacis worked with gangs of streetkids--vagabonds, thieves, and runaways. Attempting to awaken, through play, orphans traumatized by war, Lacis constructed situations for theater improvised and performed by children. Her pedagogy aimed to prepare the young for radical democracy. Allowing a spontaneous alliance to form between the war orphans and the street gangs, rehearsals led to a children's festival in the public domain of the city.[11] In his "Program for a Proletarian Theater," Benjamin attacked bourgeois education and called for a pedagogy that would affect the total life of the child. The collective of children would challenge the boundaries imposed by middle-class separation and isolation and the educators would learn by observation from the children's gestural and mimetic behaviors that were usually stifled in the classroom by adult authority.

In the mimetic improvisations of children Benjamin saw a revolutionary possibility: children approach objects as alive and changeable entities, continually reinventing them, animating them, directing them toward new purposes. In this

way the child becomes free of the living death that haunts the adult's encounter with the commodity; that is, the reification of experience unable to challenge the false appearance of social relations as inevitable or natural. In the case of the Proletarian Children's Theater, the adult would learn by observing the child, keeping a correct distance to avoid unwelcome interference in the "radical release of play." [12] While cultural studies theorists made similar claims on behalf of proletarian subcultures, their analyses--following the lead of the Birmingham School--are sociological and ethnographic but rarely experimental. What would an approach more receptive to the legacies of the avant-garde produce in response to contemporary media culture?

The pertinence of the College of Sociology to the question of childhood is usefully represented in an essay by Michel Leiris, "The Sacred in Everyday Life," in which the world of childhood is explored for the cultic value ascribed to ordinary objects and spaces that, as Leiris comments, "Had we been older and more erudite, we doubtless would not have hesitated to consider these things directly in touch with the gods of the underworld." [13] It was with the same conjunction of childhood and primitivism that Benjamin had written that Proletarian Children's Theater "is in the realm of children what the Carnival was to the ancient cults." [14] The College investigated the origins of community in violent sacrifice--and in this they can be seen to be responding to a new age in

which cinema palaces had come to function as cenotaphs [15] conjuring the ghosts in the society of total war (a striking example is D.W. Griffith's Birth of a Nation). Community would henceforth be symbolized through the cinematic spectacle of the return of the dead, in a parody of what the College would uncover as the law of the ancient festivals: film operates as a denial of sacred expenditure.

Both childhood and the tribal are constructions of literacy. Now electronic media occupies the space in which we imagine our archaic origins. The child, like the storyteller, revealed itself to Benjamin only as it was buried under the debris of progress: the invention of TV, first used by the Nazis, would threaten, with the advent of an American-style culture industry, to the extinction of the private world of book literacy that had nurtured--and tyrannized--the child. TV enters the home and displaces the superego maintained by bourgeois property and enforced through the technology of print. The new logic of the ever replaceable commodity directed at the narcissist of any age and potential market would intrude directly into the previously separate world of childhood. The cultic dimension of the world of children provided a clue to a politics of the coming electronic age. The rituals of adolescence were to come under the direction of the culture industry, just as the Nazi apparatus had captured youth with a cult of the fuhrer: Woodstock succeeds Olympia. While the restoration of a communal experience of time through ritualistic performance

remained a potential means of transmitting regional and class experiences, local traditions everywhere now interfaced with the imagery of global TV.

The Berlin Olympics are often remembered by Leni Riefenstahl's famous film version, but the games were also the first sports event to be broadcast "live" on TV.[16] Lacan's theory of the subject and Benjamin's analysis of art and industrialism, both to have such a strong influence on later studies of mass media (in particular of cinema) also appeared in the same year as this first TV spectacle. Several commentators have taken note of Jacques Lacan's reference to his attendance at the 1936 Olympics.[17] Lacan went to Berlin after delivering an early version of his famous paper "The Mirror Stage" at the Psychoanalytic Congress at Marienbad. 1936 also saw the first publication, in French, of Benjamin's essay "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" which includes, in the final footnote, what could also be a reference to the same Olympic spectacle attended by Lacan: "In big parades and monster rallies, in sports events, and in war, all of which nowadays are captured by camera and sound recording, the masses are brought face to face with themselves." [18] Both Hal Foster and Susan Buck-Morss have speculated on this point of connection between the Lacan and Benjamin texts: Foster claiming that Lacan provides us with "a theory of the modern subject as a fascistic subject" [19]--the fascist imagines a massive, unified self armored against a threatening otherness that must be

ruthlessly repressed; Buck-Morss showing that this unity was visualized in spectacles of industrialized order imposed on the natural and human world.[20] Benjamin, who embodied many facets of the otherness feared and hated by the fascist--as Jewish, leftist intellectual--saw the modern Olympics in the context of the mechanization and reification of human labor in the industrial science of Taylorism.[21]

What more can be said about this particular historical conjunction? In Rickels' reading of the reciprocity of psychoanalysis and the developing technical media apparatus, the TV screen presents a surface of perverse resistance to Oedipalization or a blockage to mourning, suspending the subject in a dream-state of regressive narcissism. Rickels returns to a media analogy for primary narcissism as "a blank screen" left aside by Freud.[22] Benjamin's comments on the spectacle: "mass movements, including war, constitute a form of human behavior which particularly favors mechanical equipment." [23] Rickels offers us an extension of this observation in psychoanalytic-televisual terms: "The "live" participation of the entire population in total war fulfills a phantasmatic wish (of the ego): to fast forward beyond the aloneness of one's own death to the death of all at the same time" (101). The TV viewer disavows absence and death through the "live" action on the screen that extends his own imagined being by displacing the death drive onto the mass death provided by the militarized consumer spectacle. Virilio's proposition that "Cinema is war" [24] applies to the

increased extension of audiovisual technology into the domestic space through TV:

> Total war takes us from military secrecy (the second hand, recovered truth of the battlefield) to the overexposure of live broadcast. For with the advent of strategic bombing everything is now brought home to the cities, and it is no longer just the few but a whole mass of spectator-survivors who are the surviving spectators of combat. Nuclear deterrence means that there are no longer strictly "foreign wars" . . . . the streets themselves become a permanent film-set for army cameras or the tourist-reporters of global civil war. (66)

The Nazis had wielded the new cinema apparatus (and to some degree TV also) to devastating effect, mobilizing their population through propaganda into a state of total war. Today TV serves the same purpose; but as Virilio points out, with videos and walkmans (and we should add personal computers) we are increasingly "directors of our own reality" (66). The increasing mobility of audiovisual technology makes the entire world a potential screen: and cinema has lost its central role in congregating populations as national death cults (67).

In his 1949 version of "The Mirror Stage" Lacan cites Roger Caillois,[25] explaining how the formation of the ego has its origin in a process of what Caillois called "*depersonalization by assimilation to space.*" [26] The autonomous self is produced as an optical effect as a body attempts to conform to an encoded visual surface and to inhabit a landscape constituted as the field of the other's gaze (one of Lacan's examples is camouflage in warfare, whereby the imagined gaze may be an enemy plane). Thus,

writes Lacan, the subject, "caught up in a lure of spatial identification", assumes "an alienating identity, which will mark with its rigid structure the subject's entire mental development" (4). In all of these references to mimicry the notion of a fascistic subject assimilated into the collective militarist spectacle--either present in ranks or enthralled in front of the screen--seems to "fit". Already in Lacan's theory of the subject, following Caillois' investigation of mimicry, the self image has begun to take the detour of the photographic technology that will increasingly recode the surface of the city streets and the battlefield. Trying to "blend in," afraid of going to pieces, consciousness shuts down the messages its own body would alert it to under less routinely terrorizing conditions: fear motivates rigidity of performance. Mimicry tends toward a becoming-inanimate: "a sort of *instinct of renunciation* that orients it toward a mode of reduced existence, which in the end would no longer know either consciousness or feeling." [27]

The College

Benjamin's attendance at the College of Sociology appears to have left few traces: Denis Hollier collects various mentions from different memoirs. But Benjamin's attendance was "regular." [28] We know that Benjamin was publicly critical of certain writings by Caillois,[29] who shared with many of the Surrealists his fascination with mimicry. Mimicry, according to Caillois, collapsed the

distinction "between the organism and its surroundings." [30] This emphasis on distinction (as Hollier has pointed out), is made by Caillois in "the Winter Wind," an inaugural lecture at the College in 1937, when discussing the relationship of the individual to modern society: "No longer having anything other than defensive reactions toward society, this person naturally reserves sympathy for all those kept on the margin, delinquents, streetwalkers and outlaws." [31] Caillois offers Baudelaire (41) as an example of the alienation and aloofness of the modern individual. But, he goes on to argue, this individualism also gives rise to the common fantasy of "a mysterious association in the midst of contemporary society" or "the formation of a new aristocracy": the monastic or military order now becomes an explicit model for the avant-garde (Bataille had founded his own secret society, *Acephale*, in 1936). This masculine power, would be able to counteract the social degeneration produced by the newest form of slavery: commodity capitalism.[32] Narcissistic desire for gratification was for Caillois a feminine condition unable to resist surrender to pleasure; only an organization of virile strength could do effective combat with modernity.

If for Caillois Baudelaire as dandy embodied the possibility of the self's continued autonomy as artwork, Benjamin investigated Baudelaire's other life as prostituted commodity. Caillois had described insect mimicry as "a photography on the level of the object and not on that of the image . . . sculpture-photography." [33] In Benjamin's study of

Baudelaire, the poem is understood as a trace of the historical forces that impinge on the body of the poet--a kind of photographic document:

> Of the countless movements of switching, inserting, pressing, and the like, the "snapping" of the photographer has had the greatest consequences. A touch of the finger now sufficed to fix an event for an unlimited period of time. The camera gave the moment posthumous shock, as it were. Tactile experiences of this kind were joined by optic ones, such as are supplied by the advertising pages of a newspaper or the traffic of a big city. Moving through this traffic involves the individual in a series of shocks and collisions. At dangerous crossings, nervous impulses flow through him in rapid succession, like the energy from a battery. Baudelaire speaks of a man who plunges into the crowd as into a reservoir of electric energy.[34]

Baudelaire's electronic analogy alerts us to the sacrifice of critical distance that characterizes a new mode of information reception: "He [Baudelaire] indicated the price for which the sensation of the modern age may be had: the disintegration of the aura in the experience of shock" (154). In the same way that photography registered shock retrospectively by fixing a response in an image, Baudelaire, through a dialectic of distance and immersion, critique and identification, attempted to master his experience poetically. Benjamin makes use of Freud's theory of unconscious memory traces in combination with Proust's *memoire involuntaire* to approach the reserve of "memory images deposited in the limbs" (115), adopting Freud's notion of consciousness as an essentially reactive, protective screen against shock. The more that consciousness registers shock the less it introjects into its unconscious system of

corporeal mnenonics. The conditions of metropolitan life had the potential to induce continual trauma if not effectively screened out. Baudelaire invented a lyric poetry of the modern city by relentlessly attending to the aggressive stimuli that assaulted him from all sides, and that the new urban masses braced themselves against in order to survive in this unfamiliar environment.

An important context for considering Benjamin's attention to the experience of shock is provided by his comments in the 1936 essay "The Storyteller" regarding those who returned from the battlefields of World War I so traumatized by the forces of industrial technology that they were unable to communicate their experiences. Experience, writes Benjamin, "has fallen in value":

> What ten years later was poured out in the flood of war books was anything but experience that goes from mouth to mouth. And there was nothing remarkable about that. For never has experience been contradicted more thoroughly than strategic experience by tactical warfare, economic experience by inflation, bodily experience by mechanical warfare, moral experience by those in power.[35]

One writer who managed to produce a more immediate account of the experience of modern war than those Benjamin mentions was Ernst Junger, who published Steel Storms in 1920: "In this war where fire already attacked space more than men, I felt completely alien to my own purpose, as if I had been looking at myself through binoculars." Such a statement, Virilio explains, reveals the degree to which military technology had

already begun to displace human perceptions by what would increasingly become photographic forms of surveillance.[36]

The impact of industrial technology on mass experience was to make individual consciousness effectively redundant. Developing a different critical position to Benjamin's, Adorno was to follow Freud's analysis of group psychology in his diagnosis of mass experience:

> The psychological "impoverishment" of the subject that "surrendered itself to the object" which "it has substituted for its most important constituent," i.e., the superego, anticipates almost with *clairvoyance* the post psychological de-individualized social atoms which form the fascist collectivities.[37]

In April 1939, Benjamin reportedly planned to deliver "Some Motifs in Baudelaire" as a lecture to the College[38] --the lecture was postponed but was never to happen: in its place Hans Mayer gave a talk on the secret societies in Germany that prefigured the organizations of the Third Reich (263). The text of "Some Motifs in Baudelaire" that we have inherited begins by positioning Baudelaire in relation to his readers, drawing on the famous evocation that begins the *Fleurs du Mal*: "*Au Lecteur.*" Benjamin says of this public:

> Will power and the ability to concentrate are not their strong points; what they prefer is sensual pleasures; they are familiar with the "spleen" which kills interest and receptiveness. It is strange to come across a lyric poet who addresses himself to this, the least rewarding type of audience. There is of course a ready explanation for it. Baudelaire was anxious to be understood; he dedicates his book to kindred spirits.[39]

Benjamin was writing this essay partly in response to Adorno's criticisms of "The Paris of the Second Empire in

Baudelaire," a portion of the larger Arcades Project which he had submitted to the Institute of Social Research in 1937.

Who were Benjamin's "kindred spirits"? For just as Baudelaire had raised an untimely lyric voice against the onset of modern urbanism, Benjamin appeared as an unlikely critic at the arrival of electronic globalism; and just as the commodity culture of 19th century Paris had given rise to a phantasmagoria, a fantastic illusion of perpetual wish-fulfillment which threatened to overwhelm individual voice and traditional community alike (the two founding possibilities of the lyric), so would the emergence of televisual technologies and mass spectacle produce a mode of reception in which critical consciousness (the reality principle of the superego) was no longer functional. Benjamin accounts for the decline in the popularity of lyric poetry by the emergence of a "philosophy of life" that sought to distinguish "true" experience from that of mass society. Benjamin sees such thinking leading toward the fascist evocation of nature and myth to support a re-constructed subjectivity; a denial of the historical texture of experience that Benjamin will demonstrate is manifest in Baudelaire's poems. Refusing the apparent safety of a critical separation supported by nostalgia, Benjamin attempted to engage actively and directly with the "enemy." Baudelaire's ambivalence was not without its fascist elements--irrationalism, anti-semitism--at the same time as

it also offered revolutionist postures. How best to account for this doubleness?

Mayer's account--given at the lecture that replaced Benjamin's at the College--of the traditions of sacred violence that had remained latent in German culture until their recent resurgence outlines an historical dimension of fascism not accounted for by Freud's theory of regression. Benjamin's research connected with the Freudo-Marxist synthesis of the Frankfurt School and the "ethnographic surrealism" [40] of the College of Sociology and thereby conducts an exchange between two influential critiques of fascism and the electronic imaginary. While Benjamin's study of Baudelaire researches into the pre-history of certain experiences of modernity out of which fascism was to arise, he does not prescribe the necessity of critical consciousness without the detour of experimental (electric) contact. If for Adorno, as for Freud (whom he cites), group identity was essentially regressive, Benjamin followed Baudelaire's passage through the sensorium of mass culture as a factor in the sacrificial logic of resistance and heroism in the modern age. Benjamin's tracking of Baudelaire retained a certain critical distance while discovering in his poetic gesture a key to modernity. Benjamin was able to hook up with Bataille's group, who produced an alternative analysis of fascism in terms of the electrical power of the sacred. As Bataille defined it:

> *Heterogeneous* reality is that of a force or shock. It presents itself as a charge, as a value, passing from

> one object to another in a more or less abstract fashion, almost as if the change were taking place not in the world of objects but only in the judgments of the subject.[41]

Bataille's term *heterogeneity* puts the sacred into a level of intensity that shares with the impact of the industrial metropolis a power to over-ride individual consciousness but also potentially to put the unconscious into overdrive as revolution. In the mythic heroisms and utopian fantasies that survived within industrial culture, Benjamin perceived enclaves of a potentially explosive energy that would be tapped and conducted by the fascist imaginary. Yet this heroism might be diverted toward different ends. Where Adorno adopted Freud's model of regression, Benjamin gravitated toward the French model of the sacred and found a momentary refuge in a secret community of scholars--just as he had found spaces of revolutionary possibility in the close-ups opened up by photography's mechanical eye: a mimetic participation-without-belonging.

So we are left with a few snapshots of Benjamin at the College of Sociology. Where Benjamin rediscovered Baudelaire on the streets of Paris by mimicking the techniques of surveillance and tracking used by detectives in the age of photography, we need to reconsider Benjamin in light of his own trajectories through Paris and beyond. Refusing (or excluded from) a pose of masculine rigidity preserving itself from the threat of social difference--whether in its fascist form or in the fantasies of French intellectuals--Benjamin

was carried away on a catastrophic wave along with the other masses of displaced peoples, the victims of total war.

Buried in the corporeal archives of the community were the memories of primordial shock, awaiting their release through sacred ritual. In the secular age of industrial capitalism, these rituals were being forgotten under the stress of the compulsive repetitions that had come to define metropolitan behaviors, only to be resurrected and refashioned by the fascist apparatus. So the explosive energies contained by mass society and the dubious aesthetics of photographic realism and journalism became a reserve of primary political significance. The Frankfurt School's withdrawal into another enclave that would preserve critical rationality and from there direct its critique at the culture industry did not prove to be Benjamin's destination until Adorno took custody of in Benjamin's writings.

Return of the Dead

Denis Hollier reports Benjamin's attendance at the College for Caillois' lecture on festival[42] which, in its emphasis on regeneration through sacred excess and expenditure, would have been of interest to Benjamin. Caillois evoked festival with images of the return of the dead and a temporary economy of play and transgression that banished lack, thrift, and *work*. In The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte, Marx had summoned these images to distinguish between a revolutionary evocation of the past and

a reactionary one, the former represented by the original French and English revolutions and the latter by the events of 1848:

> The awakening of the dead in those revolutions therefore served the purpose of glorifying the new struggles, not of parodying the old; of magnifying the given tasks in imagination, not of taking flight from their solution in reality; of finding once more the spirit of revolution, not of making its ghost walk again.[43]

Benjamin pursued a similar distinction in the various expressions of the myth of the Golden Age--discussed by Caillois as the world ritually returned through festive celebration--that depicted a world without scarcity: deployed in both the utopian visions of Fourier and as their technological realization in commodity display.[44] While the myth contains the revolutionary hope of social regeneration, it assumes its dominant form in the myth of progress and the forgetting of the exploitation of labor. Anticipating the interest at the College of Sociology in festival, Benjamin had found an authentic image of the Golden Age in the children's theater of Asja Lacis: "Everything is turned upside down, and just as master served slave during the Roman Saturnalia, so during the performance, children stand on stage and teach and educate their attentive educators." [45] For Benjamin, connected also to Brecht, festival embodied tradition but now took on the caste of a revolutionary pedagogy.

Caillois' conclusion to his 1950 version of the lecture on festival (which forms a chapter in his Man and the Sacred)

was that "the old alternation between feast and labor" had been replaced by one between "stable tranquillity, and compulsory violence." [46] Total war was the new face of sacred expenditure. Georges Limbour, another colleague of Bataille, had written:

> I imagine a meeting in hell between Aeschylus's troupe of ten or so shades with diversely fearsome wooden faces and a handful of ghosts from my own time, ghosts in absolutely identical masks with no semblance of a human trait. 'Who the hell are these pigheads that all look alike?' asks Aeschylus. These are not snouts, dear father of tragedy, they are gas masks . . . [47]

The spectacle of militarism extends into the physiognomy of the fascist type as anonymous, masked, unfeeling--the mass man.

Adorno and Horkheimer were to cite Caillois' essay on festival, following the College of Sociology in noting the disappearance of useless expenditure under totalitarian capitalism.[48] Benjamin had commented that in the 1936 Olympics the athletes no longer competed against each other as much as against measurement of their performance by the technological apparatus.[49] The contorted faces of the exhausted runners at the end of the marathon in Leni Riefenstahl's Olympia: The Festival of the People strangely resemble those survivors who emerged (on camera) at the liberation of the camps in 1945. The violence perpetuated on the victims of Nazism was the catastrophic projection of the self-annihilation demanded by the regime of *everyone*, including the brutalized indifference that was the mask of the victimizers. The death imposed on the other only

mirrored the living-death demanded by the sacrificial economy of fascism.

Olympia calls forth the Greek past and presents its renewal in the mass spectacle of the German Reich; but the pagan dead return only as exploited bodies in an age of automation.[50] Totalitarianism glorifies pain and work ("Work makes you free") but denies death as expenditure or loss--working out represses working through. Noel Burch explains how the cinema machine from its beginnings performed its function as a part of a larger ideological formation, what he calls the "Doctor Frankenstein dream." [51] The electronic reproduction of Life as the power over death--has one of its consequences in industrialized mass murder: war and extermination re-run as the parade of undead that return to vampyrize the living. The crowd of the unmourned who have always threatened to play havoc in the world of the living and were therefore given free reign at predetermined, culturally sanctioned periods of Carnival, now co-exist in the purgatorial present of television. The solution posed by fascism to this question was to glorify the expendability of the individual at no cost to the collective will channeled ceaselessly into production.

Doubling the fascist death-wish is the fascination with catastrophe that haunted Bataille's groups. In a fragment by Leiris on the "Debacle," from the journal Documents, the desire for annihilation that arose in those paralyzed by the financial disasters of the 20s finds its revolutionary

expression in the annihilation of "*absolutely everything*" [52] --returning expenditure to the apocalypse desired by the living dead of market capitalism. Benjamin's vision of the apocalypse contained the hope of Messianic redemption. The ecstatic obliteration invoked in Bataille's "Practice of Joy before Death" [53] refuses the Oedipal burden of mourning where Benjamin perceives the always-immanent arrival of the Messiah.

Adorno had mourned the aloneness of Benjamin's death and attempted to confront the sense of desertion he experienced in its wake. The condition of unmourning that Adorno and Horkheimer saw as common to fascism and the American culture industry was diagnosed as a regressive group narcissism excluding the responsibility of critical separation. Baudelaire's poetics put Benjamin on the circuit that connected him, via the telepathy of the Surrealists, to Bataille's College. Although Benjamin resisted celebrating the bliss of total obliteration through Bataille's techniques of the sacred, he did produce his own electric body in the Messiah inhabiting the constellations of capitalism's light shows. Bataille came to see, in his later Theory of Religion, festival's sacred disruption of the rhythms of labor and thrift as a "limited solution";[54] for festival is always reclaimed by necessity, production, and use: it has only the negative value of a temporary release. Like Bataille, Benjamin saw expenditure as a liberation from subjectivity dominated by the industrial-mercantile regulation of time as

a commodity. Both saw this principle of expenditure redirected by the totalitarian state into catastrophic destruction.

The electronic body presented itself in the imagination of the European avant-garde as a range of possibilities: from the fascist spectacle of Olympia and the militarized *imago*, camouflaged and masked; to the elusive *other*, feminine or exotic--both alternatives pose the loss of individual consciousness as separation. In Fritz Lang's 1926 film Metropolis, the electric robot, disguised as a female visionary, leads a phoney revolution that hands the proletariat over to their oppressors. If, as critics from Adorno and Lacan to Burch have pointed out, the modern subject of electronic culture is a Frankensteinian fantasy, a simulacrum that conquers death only by becoming-dead-to-itself, then alternatives to this condition have also been imagined. While Adorno adopted Freud's analysis of the group and thereby reaffirmed the critical function of the superego, Benjamin came close to Bataille while discovering in Baudelaire's dandyism the logic of sacrifice in a market economy .

Notes

[1] Sylvia Harvey, May '68 and Film Culture (London: British Film Institute, 1980) p. 45.
[2] "Cultural Politics of Pop," p. 90.

[3] Patricia Mellencamp, "Video and the Counterculture," Global Television, eds. Cynthia Schneider & Brian Wallis (New York: Wedge Press; Cambridge Massachusetts: MIT, 1988).
[4] "The Author as Producer," p. 299.
[5] Neil Postman, The Disappearance of Childhood (New York: Delacorte Press, 1982).
[6] For a discussion of these issues see Michael Taussig, Mimesis and Alterity: A Particular History of the Senses (New York & London: Routledge, 1993).
[7] Case of California, p. 31.
[8] Stanley Arronowitz, Roll Over Beethoven: The Return of Cultural Strife, (Hanover, Wesleyan University Press, 1993) p. 197.
[9] Illuminations, p. 262.
[10] see Jack Zipes, "Building a Children's Theater: 2 Documents," Performance Vol. 1 No. 5 March/April 1973, pp. 22-24.
[11] "A Memoir," pp. 24-27.
[12] Walter Benjamin, "Program for a Proletarian Children's Theater," trans. Susan Buck-Morss. Performance Vol. 1 No. 5 March/April 1973, p. 31.
[13] College of Sociology, p. 26.
[14] "Program," p. 32.
[15] War and Cinema, p. 31.
[16] The Case of California, p. 109.
[17] Ecrits, p. 239.
[18] Illuminations, p. 253.
[19] Hal Foster, "Postmodernism in Parallax," October 63 Winter 1993 p. 8.
[20] Susan Buck-Morss, "Aesthetics and Anaesthetics: Walter Benjamin's Artwork Essay Reconsidered" October 62 Fall 1992, p. 32-35.
[21] Dialectics of Seeing, p. 326.
[22] Case of California, p. 93.
[23] Illuminations, p. 253.
[24] War and Cinema, p. 30.
[25] Ecrits, p. 3.
[26] Roger Caillois, "Mimicry and Legendary Pyschaesthenia," trans. John Shepley. October p. 30.
[27] "Mimicry," p. 32.
[28] College of Sociology, xxi.
[29] College of Sociology, p. 234.
[30] "Mimicry," p. 17.
[31] College of Sociology, p. 35.
[32] see Denis Hollier, "Mimesis and Castration 1937," October 31 Winter 1984 pp. 3-15.
[33] "Mimicry, p. 23.
[34] Charles Baudelaire, p. 132.

[35] Illuminations p. 84.
[36] War and Cinema, pp. 72-73.
[37] Theodor Adorno, "Freudian Theory and the Pattern of Fascist Propaganda," The Essential Frankfurt School Reader, eds. Arato and Gebhart (New York: Continuum, 1982), p. 136.
[38] College of Sociology, xxi.
[39] Charles Baudelaire, p. 109.
[40] This phrase is James Clifford's.
[41] Visions of Excess, p. 143.
[42] College of Sociology, xxi.
[43] Marx-Engels Reader., p. 596.
[44] Dialectics of Seeing, pp. 118-120.
[45] "Program," p. 32.
[46] College of Sociology, pp. 302-303.
[47] "A Documents Dossier," p. 56.
[48] Dialectic of Enlightenment, p. 106.
[49] Dialectics of Seeing, p. 326.
[50] "Olympia" was the name of the female automaton in E.T.A. Hoffman's story "The Sandman."
[51] Life to those Shadows, pp. 20-21.
[52] "A Documents Dossier," p. 27.
[53] Visions of Excess, pp. 235-239.
[54] Georges Bataille, Theory of Religion (New York: Zone, 1989) p. 53.

CONCLUSION

The scene with which I began this discussion, the 1936 Berlin Olympics, was chosen because it usefully condensed in one image a number of key historical forces that have shaped the twentieth-century: a political movement, fascism; an intellectual movement, psychoanalysis; and a technological medium, television. The scene was also chosen because it served as a useful counterpoint to the figure of Walter Benjamin, whose exile from Nazi Germany makes him representative of those forces and tendencies in modern history that have resisted the fascist appropriation of technology and offered alternatives to it. This seems to me the lasting importance of Benjamin's legacy: that he not only offered an analysis of fascism but also the promise of a different political and cultural future.

The era during which Benjamin undertook his great research experiment, the Arcades Project, as well as the era of his posthumous fame, coincides with the invention and installation of global TV. TV appears to us today in a new light as it is gradually displaced by the home computer as the central domestic information appliance. The resurrection of Benjamin's Arcades Project coincides with this moment in a series of mutations of the televisual. Benjamin remains for

us a significant theorist who perceived and documented the emergence and prehistory of electronic media. Benjamin's writings turned on two moments in this process: the phantasmagoria of Napoleon III's Second Empire and the Fuhrer cult of the Third Reich. Benjamin's own death marks a passage toward a third mutation, articulated by Adorno in exile in California.

The institutionalization of modernism in the American museum and academy was contemporary with the emergence of television as the synthetic realization of what Adorno and Horkheimer called the culture industry. The installation of a monumental "last European" operates as a function of that industry insofar as it does not challenge the smooth exchange of stereotypes characteristic of the new media. I have tried to show how the death of Benjamin has given rise to a drama of mourning as his writings have been received into the corpus of modern literature. Benjamin has come to embody a cultural stereotype: the writer in exile is a hero for those who lament the passing of high modernism and its values of cosmopolitan literacy. To the degree that such lamentation creates an atmosphere of historical inevitability rather than a sense of social renewal, such an elevation of Benjamin's memory contributes to the mystification of the past and effectively supports the existing cultural order.

Ironically it was Hannah Arendt, who of the postwar German-Jewish intellectuals most persistently called for and provided a model of ethical responsibility in the public

sphere, who began the reconstruction of Benjamin for an American audience as part "last European," part outlaw hero. Favoring an Enlightenment notion of freedom as participation, by rational discourse, in a popular public sphere she separated Benjamin from his own espousal of proletarian revolution. From Adorno to de Man, emigre intellectuals retreated from the public sphere insofar as they saw it, in Adorno's case, hopelessly dominated by corporate interests or, in de Man's (perhaps), hopelessly contaminated by the ethical mistakes of the past. What all of these intellectuals who survived Benjamin had in common was their experience of the catastrophic effects of both Fascist and Communist totalitarianism.

Those who claim Benjamin as a hero of Marxist "revolutionary criticism" have also invested in the image of intellectual as displaced person, with a sense that cultural displacement allows for the development of a critical distance whose potential belongs to a politicized pedagogy. But does this pedagogy, which usually founds itself on Benjamin's alliance with Brecht, continue to respond effectively to the media apparatus amid which the legacy of the European avant-garde has emerged? What McLuhan called the "tribal voices" called forth by radio and TV constitute a new symbolic realm whose mode of expression is celebrity status. This "death cult" drives the proliferation of commodities produced by the culture industry as well as the subcultural and multi-ethnic deviations that circulate in the

global arena of popular culture (the paradigmatic example for cultural studies has become Elvis Presley). That the radio and TV have displaced, and often *re*placed, the older voices of cultural authority is commonly accepted. What strategies does the displaced critical intellectual offer in a situation of electronic immersion?

In the age of TV melodrama, the reconstruction of Benjamin that focuses on his relation to women and children also puts him in contact with the missing persons of the era of middle-class literacy. Encrypted with the monumental installation of Benjamin as writer in exile are all of those displaced persons whose disappearance is necessary to the business of terror that supports multinational capital. The love stories that attach themselves to the names of the authors I have discussed are also stories of banishment and incarceration: Asja Lacis was exiled by Stalin, Breton's Nadja was committed to an insane asylum, Bataille's Simone (from The Story of the Eye) ends her life in a "torture camp."

The Enlightenment, or bourgeois, public sphere supported a model of a rational subject whose discourse identified him as white and middle-class. Those voices excluded from this domain--women, minorities, youth, working class, unemployed--are positioned by media culture as consumers of the image. The subject of mass culture has learned to read across the codes of public discourses motivated by ideological, political, and commercial interests

and s/he occupies discursive spaces without the critical distance that was the privileged possession of those who participated in the bourgeois public sphere. Mass media repeats the suppression of social consciousness through a marketing operation that denies difference by "incorporating" it.

While the bourgeois public sphere maintained the rational suppression of myth, its own status was mythic insofar as its rationality was founded on the privilege of private property and the repression of a vast social Other. This historical contradiction is the basis for the continuing dispute over high and mass culture, of which the Benjamin-Adorno exchange has become such a valuable articulation. The commodifaction of culture in the industrial age led Adorno to warn Benjamin against idealizing the proletariat, while the economic privilege that supported Adorno's own aesthetic standards remained deeply problematic. For many the historical impact of totalitarianism led to the abandonment of the notion of a revolutionary proletariat.

Andreas Huyssen has noted that Adorno's "ultimate bogeyman" is the question of *identification*,[1] i.e. was all suspension of critical distance necessarily fascistic? Two other German intellectuals, like Huyssen, of the generation that succeeded Adorno, Oskar Negt and Alexander Kluge, have responded to these issues by pursuing a theory of a counter-public sphere based in proletarian collectivities.[2] Following Benjamin, they pay attention to the importance of

fantasy as a residue of historical experience under the conditions of alienated labor. While the culture industry orchestrates these fantasies they remain in important ways beyond the reach of absolute commodification. While neither Benjamin nor Negt and Kluge fall into the mistake of idealizing these fantasies as they exist (they tend toward social conservatism), they do point to a profound source of identity and social meaning within a general political economy. While the successes of Nazism and Hollywood attest to the ability of the right to capture popular fantasy, we need to remain open to the fact that this historical appropriation does not represent the only political possibility. It is towards another set of possibilities that these final reflections are directed.

Heroes

In the German *Trauerspiel* Benjamin noted the reduction of historical change to the inevitability of a natural order, always staged as the repetition of actions embodying Biblical authority. The response that such a predictable and processional representation of history invited was melancholy. Against the critics of German literature who preceded him, Benjamin argued that the dominant Aristotelian definition of tragedy was inadequate to account for the tragic dramas of the Baroque. Looking for an historical understanding of the tragic, Benjamin struggled against the immediate legacy of Wagner and Neitzsche (both of whom he

sees as having fallen back into a universalizing aestheticism) by taking up the tradition of legend. According to Benjamin the hero of ancient tragedy derives directly from the victim of ritual sacrifice. The hero articulates on his own body what remains unspeakable for the community he comes to represent. Legend is the "primordial history of the nation" [3] and the sacrifice brings into formation a community which is born at the expense of the hero's individual will. Tragedy presents the death of kings because "royal descent is an indication of the dramatic character's origin in the heroic age" (110). *Trauerspiel*, on the other hand, presents the king as "the representative of history" (65), a history in which the stage turns like clockwork and there is no collective experience of mythic renewal.

The silent encounter with his fate by the ancient tragic hero is contrasted by Benjamin with the didactic purpose of Plato's dramatization of the death of Socrates. The Platonic reconstruction of the tragic lead to the development of the martyr-drama, so different in its voluntary choice of death from the hero's struggle with fate. Tragedy was a drama of atonement in which the hero's body was sacrificed to effect a communal renewal which, according to Benjamin, the death of the philosopher resembled only superficially. The meaning of the death of the hero is socially unconscious; that of the philosopher conscious and pedagogical. In Plato's Crito, Socrates explains why he refuses to flee Athens and

deliberately remains to meet his political fate. Socrates' denigration of the body in favor of the immaterial soul informs his stoic acceptance of death at the order of the state: this is simply the price for founding a more rational and spiritual community which will become the founding academy of the Western tradition.

Benjamin always stressed the corporeality of the body of the hero in ancient tragedy and even the lifeless types of the *Trauerspiel* took on a materiality in relation to the menacing qualities of stage props and emblems in the Baroque scene. Benjamin's own death, as a modern example of the exemplary death of the philosopher, is distinguished from Socrates' in its desperate flight across borders, its failed attempt to escape the totalitarian state, its anonymity, its relation to historical catastrophe. The suicide of Hitler in the bunker in 1945 echoes the suicide of Benjamin, insofar as there often appears a symbolic symmetry in the relation of tyrant and martyr, or in what Foucault saw in the doubles of the king's body and the body of the condemned man.[4] The person of the king has often included both an ordinary, physical body of a sacred body constituted through ritual, and this duality is inherited by those modern leaders whose image takes on a mythic aura. Behind the various masks of his power, the tyrant disappears: secrecy has long been understood to enhance an effect of an all-pervasive presence, of continual surveillance by an interiorized gaze. In this way the spread of panoptical power produces a double body in

the victim also, an incarcerating interiority that is a by-product of political and social technologies.

Benjamin attempts to escape the state, but fails; he commits suicide and his body is buried in an unmarked grave. The totalitarian state attempts to re-fashion individual consciousness in terms of pure function, obedience, and fear. As opposed to the absolute authority that is the one desire of the tyrant, the body of the philosopher Benjamin disappears as authorial presence.

Foucault investigated the idea of the author as a *function* of institutional practices. The modern writer, notes Foucault, becomes another mutation of the ancient tragic hero: "The work, which once had the duty of providing immortality, now possesses the right to kill, to be its author's murderer, as in the cases of Flaubert, Proust and Kafka." [5] Benjamin joins the list of modernist literary heroes, the victim of his own lifework. Moreover, the modern writer has increasingly effaced individual voice as a sacrificial gesture in which he assumes "the role of a dead man in the game of writing" (103). Benjamin's experiments with historiography as montage in his major undertaking, the Arcades Project, are an example of the disappearance of the author in a text deliberately and visibly constructed from citations. The development of Benjamin's aesthetic needs to be understood in its reciprocal relation to the rise of fascism and the totalitarian extension of the authority of voice--the Furher whose word was law. Rejecting the

scriptural notion of writing (*ecriture*)--the quality of sacred text that Benjamin, by contrast, *did* show a considerable interest in (through his long friendship with Scholem)--as a duplication of the transcendental status of the author, Foucault proposes instead the question of institutional function: "The author . . . serves to neutralize the contradictions that may emerge in a series of texts" (111). The tragic legend of Benjamin serves to explain, for certain of his interpreters, what are seen as inconsistent lapses into Marxism; for his Marxist interpreters apparent lapses into aestheticism or mysticism must be similarly accounted for: somehow Benjamin as author must, through his various positions and writings, amount to a consistent truth principle--in the last resort, simply as a *personality*.

Benjamin shares certain characteristics with a host of other "doomed and poignant" figures who have been the object of adolescent fixations: a failed marriage, an unhappy love life, tendencies toward drug abuse, a preference for solitude, a descent into poverty and homelessness. The fact that Benjamin was an historical victim of fascism adds another twist to this fascination; as the case of Sylvia Plath shows, suicide can become the climax of a sado-masochistic regime in which the imagery of fascism dramatizes in the domestic sphere a more general historical trauma. The final revenge taken on the body made redundant by commodification, economic recession, political foreclosure,

and information overload, lends images of total war and the Holocaust to narcissistic fantasies of mass death in which the victim is saved from dying alone.

Subculture theory has made Benjamin's *flaneur* an emblem of a "revolt into style" that distinguishes the self as super-commodity and resurrects a lost sense of community through adolescent group identification.[6] But these theories paid little attention to the funereal rhythms and apocalyptic rhetoric of the teenage dandy. Benjamin, however, noted the mournful atmosphere that pervaded the ethos of the *flaneur*:

> The resistance which modernism offers to the natural productive elan of a person is out of proportion to his strength. It is understandable if a person grows tired and takes refuge in death. Modernism must be under the sign of suicide, an act which seals a heroic will that makes no concessions to a mentality inimical towards his will. The suicide is not a resignation but a heroic passion. It is *the* achievement of modernism in the realm of passions.[7]

Benjamin observed that suicide assumed a new place in popular culture in the mid-nineteenth-century as a response to unemployment. At the same time, blacks and greys began to dominate men's fashions (76). Baudelaire's momentary glimpse of a woman who passed him in the street paid tribute to the figure of a widow, dressed in black, who disappeared into the crowd (45). The conjunction of an image of mourning with narcissism and immersion in an anonymous mass again seeks to displace the aloneness of death and loss: so unemployed workers invited their peers to join-in the collective death trip.

Immediately following his commentary on this poem by Baudelaire, Benjamin switches attention to the bourgeoisie who cover and encase every domestic object as a way of insulating themselves from the intrusions of mass society into their private domain. Anticipating the American cult of embalming, the Parisian bourgeoisie built his own coffin to inhabit as home (a visual joke is made of this in Magritte's *hommage* to Manet's "The Balcony"). Benjamin sees in these velvet-lined cases the desire to leave traces that would survive the passage of the interior's inhabitant in ways that the streets did not. The solution preferred by the *flaneur* to this threat of anonymity was to make as vivid appearance as possible on the streets and to leave behind an afterimage of his black frock coat in the consciousness of the crowds that would otherwise have passed by him with complete indifference.

Suicide is the paradoxical gesture that aims to achieve the status of individuality and memorability and to re-dress the failure to make to an impression on the crowd. By choosing a lonely death, the suicide nevertheless derives narcissistic gratification by making his/her death spectacular and thereby attains recognition from the group. In his biography of Benjamin, Bernd Witte recounts how Benjamin, despite his failing health, carried the briefcase containing his manuscript over the border into Spain where he committed suicide: "the briefcase with the manuscript, which Benjamin was concerned above all to save during his flight,

has since disappeared . . . His grave in the cemetery of the little town is no longer identifiable." [8] Benjamin had written of "that authority which even the poorest wretch in dying possesses for the living around him. This authority is the very source of the story";[9] but the art of storytelling was itself in a process of disappearing. The value of experience had continued to decline under the impact of industrialization, urbaniztion, war, inflation, and unemployment; genocide would complete the process. Suicide, as a peculiarly modern form of heroism became the ultimate expression of subjective will beyond mere survival. The gas chambers eliminated even that possibility.

The cultural memory preserved through the repetition of stories was related, in Benjamin's understanding, to the bodily mnemonics of traditional craft. A reactive shield of consciousness screened out the onslaught of urban shock, but paid the price of failing to accumulate "wisdom." Suicide became an intimate moment of self-discovery, the return of the missing social other in a self-annihilating encounter: the end of "me" became the "remember me" of the suicide's after-image, most commonly in the form of the photographic icon that would in-turn master shock retrospectively with screen idols of narcissistic fascination. Behind the iconic monument lay the remains of the suicidal body. So when Bataille attended to the question of suicide he discussed the self-mutilation of Van Gogh as an example of the sacrificial expenditure that provides the heterogeneous base of the

suicidal gesture.[10] But Benjamin chose to overdose on the ultimate chemical shock-absorber and pain-killer: morphine.

Kluge and Negt speak of the "facade of legitimation" that supports the bourgeois public sphere.[11] So the heroic myths of proletarian experience are continually displaced and refashioned by bourgeois models. It is with the purpose of reversing this process that Foucault demystifies the cult of the author and alerts us to its judico-political function: the author is "the ideological figure by which one marks the manner in which we fear the proliferation of meaning" (119). Foucault predicts that this author function will eventually disappear, and the question "Who is speaking?" will be replaced by the more pertinent "Who is able to speak?": the proliferation of meaning will always have institutional limits that must continually be analyzed and challenged.

In his efforts to produce a materialist historiography Benjamin engaged in a similar project of demystifying the cult of the author. In his 1929 essay on Goethe, originally intended for the Soviet Encyclopedia, Benjamin traces the emergence of the German nation state and empire that brought with it the posthumous reconstruction of the great Enlightenment hero, through the establishment of the Goethe Society and the Weimar edition of his works, and his institutionalization in the university system:

> But despite the never ending flood of literature produced by Goethe scholars, the bourgeoisie has never been able to make more than a limited use of his genius, to say nothing of the question of how far they understood his intention. His whole work abounds in reservations about them. And if he founded a great

> literature among them, he did so with face averted. Nor did he ever enjoy anything like the success that his genius merited; in fact he declined to do so. And this was so as to pursue his purpose of giving the ideas that inspired him the form which has enabled them to resist their dissolution at the hands of the bourgeoisie, a resistance made possible because they remained without effect and not because they could be deformed or trivialized.[12]

Clearly Benjamin's portrait of Goethe is of the order of an identification with this founding father of modern German literature:

> Goethe consciously blurred the dividing lines between the artist, the researcher and the amateur. Everything he achieved as translator, writer of travel-books, as a biographer, connoisseur, critic, physicist, educationalist and even theologian . . .--all this served to enhance his reputation for universality. (87)

Benjamin, who shared so many of these various roles he attributes to Goethe, openly declared his own ambition to become the premier critic of German literature of his generation. Benjamin saw himself, like Goethe before him, resisting assimilation by bourgeois culture and pursuing the heroic destiny of the modern writer.

"Which of us has not dreamed of himself as the hero of a book?" asked Bataille, who saw projective reading as a gratuitous form of heroic self-sacrifice.[13] "Surely there is no longer a single adolescent who has this fantasy: to be a writer!" commented Roland Barthes: "Imagine wanting to copy not the works but the practices of any contemporary--his way of strolling through the world, a notebook in his pocket and a phrase in his head."[14] In a discussion of this passage by Barthes, Gregory Ulmer generalizes this confession of

identification with the heroic figure of the writer to include all academic research in the Humanities. Barthes, who staged his own "image-system"--understood in psychoanalytic terms as all of those fantasies and narcissistic attachments that compose what Lacan called the Imaginary Order--pursued a new (poststructuralist) ethic for the subject of knowledge. In A Lover's Discourse Barthes presents himself diegetically: seated, as he claims once to have seen Andre Gide, in a cafe reading a book. The book that Barthes is reading, Goethe's The Sorrows of Young Werthe, links his writerly *mise-en-scene* to suicide.

Projective identification with the Great Writer supports the installation of the literary-critical superego which, in turn, dismisses projection as a "regressive" (or "feminine") aspect of reading. Ulmer concludes, with Barthes, that "normal criticism" is therefor "neurotic," founded in a denial giving rise to a compulsive repetition.[15] Like Barthes, Benjamin's later career would attempt, through autobiography, to come to terms with the personal image-system as a response to the Marxist denunciation of bourgeois ideology. The scene in "Berlin Chronicle" where Benjamin sits down in a Paris cafe and composes a map of his life returns the staging of the subject to the question of imaginary alliance with this outside one's own class.

As Ulmer notes, Barthes' staging of his image-system should be understood as a labor of mourning (126) and an attempt to establish a different sacrificial economy than the

one usually inherited with the apparati of critical literacy. By mourning the partial identifications that make up the image-repertoire, the writer stages his/her metaphorical suicide. In the decomposition of the ego--a personalized form of the polemical "death of the author"--the writer pursues a different style of liberation, including a deflation of the romantic grandeur that has become attached to the gesture of actual suicide.

One can read the scene of Benjamin's installation in the archive allegorically as an image of incorporation, encrypting the sacrificial impulse inscribed in Benjamin's heroic modernism. In Barthes' work of mourning we see the beginnings of a different ethic to that of the Frankfurt School style of critique, one that admits to the "stupidities" of iconic identification but that also gives up the heroism of suicide. A sacrificial *anti-monumentalism* that owes much to Bataille, forgoes the critical distance of the superego imprinted in the text of Marxian critical theory, allowing for a certain "squandering" of symbolic investments through the play of mimetic *excess*. As Bataille explained, the act of sacrificing restores a lost intimacy to the thing, restoring the utilitarian object to the realm of the sacred. This sacred, and therefor always potentially collective, realm is also where experience remains bound to fantasy. If Barthes is able to become conscious of certain ideological investments by staging his attachment to his bourgeois heroes could such a practice also open onto the

heroic myths in the proletarian unconscious of the public sphere?

The Curse of Blanqui

Those discourses oriented toward the study of media and currently institutionalized in the academy have their origins, to a significant degree, in the experience of exile. Exile has been a master trope of the culture of the book; thus it has often been understood as exile from the image and from the collective imaginary. But exile has produced its own series of compelling images, from Marx in London to Adorno in California. In an age of mass migrations we experience place in new ways, the strangeness of our physical environment further complicated by electronic media that multiply our sense of displacement with simulations of travel through time and space. For Edward Said exile demands the difficult process of mourning our narcissistic attachments to place and community.[16] In this final section I want to present some examples of such scenes that belong to the history of exile and that can be understood, in a psychoanalytic sense, as screening the identifications, fantasies, and anxieties that compose a primal scene of media studies.

Shortly before his death, which coincided with the outbreak of World War II, Freud completed Moses and Monotheism. This book, translated into English in 1939, is divided into three parts, the first two written in Vienna and

the third in exile in London. In the first preface to part three, written just prior to the *Anschluss*, Freud decides he will not publish the essay for fear of alienating the Catholic Church on whose protection he was dependent at that time; instead he will leave it among his papers:

> Thus it may lie hid until the time comes when it may safely venture into the light of day, or until someone else who reaches the same opinions and conclusions can be told: "In darker days there lived a man who thought as you did." [17]

In the second preface he "dare[s] now to make public" his essay, having arrived safely in "beautiful, free, generous England" (70).

During the same period that Freud was composing Moses and Monotheism, Walter Benjamin produced the two different drafts of his study of Baudelaire that, along with the 1935 expose of the Arcades Project, now make up the posthumous volume, Charles Baudelaire: A Lyric Poet in the Era of High Capitalism. Two volumes, two composite texts, destined for posthumous fame (or notoriety), both written under the pressures of political exile and the threat of global catastrophe.

Freud's controversial theory about Moses' origins as an Egyptian prince, that he feared would alienate both Jews and Christians, was constructed through the splitting of the legendary Moses into two different historical figures: Moses #1 had been forced to leave Egypt and had imposed monotheism on an unwilling people who had responded by rising up and murdering him; later Moses #2, an "insider" of a less heroic

caste, had covered for the assimilation of Mosaic law carried into Judaism by the Levites. Over time both figures were collapsed together in the mythic imagination. Through this historical splitting of Israel's founding father, Freud returns to the primal scene he had constructed 25 years earlier in Totem and Taboo, in which a primeval hoard shares the guilt for murdering their common father. This earlier hypothesis now supports Freud's argument that the idea of monotheism activates the "return of the repressed" and thereby unleashes a hostility based in a collective ambivalence toward the demands of an authority figure.

There is much in Freud's text to suggest his identification with the figure of the earlier Moses, who seeks to impose his austere vision on a community. Freud had after all founded his own Psychoanalytic Society, and the rigorous skepticism and moral radicalism of his world view had provoked outrage and seen his books burned publicly in Berlin. His teachings, like Moses, had forced him into exile.

In the same way that he worked with the Wolf Man's associated memories and dreams, Freud's theory of the murder of Moses that supposedly remained unconscious in the collective memory of the Jews is constructed in an intertextual space left open by fragmentary accounts and details and long periods of time unaccounted for in written records. One way that this strategic reliance on experimental construction, that mixes analysis with

imaginative play, can be situated is as a response to the experience of political exile.

Benjamin's essay, "The Paris of the Second Empire in Baudelaire" had also concerned at least two figures: behind that of Baudelaire, poet and *flaneur*, was projected the image of August Blanqui, conspirator and revolutionary hero. As in Freud's text, the connection between Baudelaire and Blanqui is founded less on fact than an imaginative superimposition. Benjamin discovers a sketch of Blanqui's profile in Baudelaire's notes.[18] Although Baudelaire's name appears listed in the membership lists of one of Blanqui's Republican Societies[19] --a fact Benjamin may or may not have known--there is very little evidence of the poet's direct involvement with or sympathy for the political leader (only marginal traces of the kind that connects Benjamin with Bataille and the College). This does not prevent Benjamin from commenting on a Baudelaire poem: "From between the lines flashes the dark head of Blanqui" (23). As in the Freudian theory of the primal hoard, the evocation of the revolutionist behind the literary text opens a space in which the collective uprising can re-appear. Experimental reconstruction leads the way to mass psychology.

The mystique that grew around Blanqui is a noteworthy example of the role that fantasy can play in populist movements. Blanquism supported a mythology as well as a set of rituals and ceremonies that took shape around the collective remembrance of the French revolutionary

tradition.[20] Benjamin describes the bohemian milieu and "mystery-mongering" [21] of political conspirators. Blanquists looked back to the heroism of the French Revolution as a model not only for political action but an entire style of life: bravery, camaraderie, anti-clericalism, a passion for revolution. It is the ritualistic dimension of their politics that is attacked by Marx and excluded from Arendt's later account of the revolutionary tradition as based in the Republican clubs (in which Blanqui played a key part). We can see the tradition of the clubs and secret societies manifested in the practices and concerns of the College of Sociology: an apocalyptic moment in the revolutionary avant-garde.

The relation of Benjamin's reading of Baudelaire to this revolutionary tradition is complex. Benjamin must have experienced a certain sense of personal as well as intellectual identification with the master whom he acknowledges in the first sentence of his essay: Marx. Benjamin conducted his research into the nineteenth century at the Bibliotheque Nationale in Paris, living in poverty and exile just as Marx, almost a century earlier, had labored in obscurity and political frustration over Capital in the reading room of the British Museum. Both Benjamin and Marx, as foreigners, experienced exclusion from wide social or intellectual influence and were reduced to dependence on the generosity of their few allies. The precursor text for Benjamin's essay on the Second Empire was Marx's famous

pamphlet The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte, one of the first significant compositions from the period following Marx's banishment from Europe.

The first thing we remember about Marx's brilliant polemic is that it follows the pattern I have noted in the other texts I have been discussing, in so far as it concerns the double-effect of two historically separate actors, the early and later Napoleons. Marx envisions Napoleon III as a travesty of his uncle, an "adventurer who hides his trivially repulsive features under the iron death mask" [22] of his heroic precursor. Marx provides us with an early critique of history as a re-make--thus the interest taken in this text by Marx during the 1980s with the emergence of the Thatcher/Reagan style of televisual politics.[23] Benjamin saw clear parallels between Marx's old enemy Napoleon III in the 1850s and Hitler in the 1930s.

Exile, from Moses to Marx, has been intimately related to the condemnation of the image. Freud explains that monotheism forbids any visual representation of its God (28). Notably, Benjamin approaches the realms of the collective imagination in ways that suspend such critical judgment.

Benjamin saw the historical parallels: writing under the sign of the Hitler-Stalin pact that had reversed almost all revolutionary hope he says of Blanqui: "Before Lenin there was no one else with a clearer profile in the proletariat" (16). Benjamin's messianic politics lead him back to Blanqui as the image of the revolutionary hero. While he notes

Marx's condemnation of conspiratorial superstition (13) and the reliance of the Blanquists on spontaneity rather than organization (15), in the "These on the Philosophy of History" Benjamin will attack the Social Democrats for forgetting Blanqui.[24] In opposition to the Social Democrats ideology of progress, Benjamin draws from the Blanquist cult of the revolutionary tradition.

The Blanquists had directly opposed monotheism with philosophical atheism. According to the Blanquist cosmology, the French Revolution was a redemptive event that overturned the religious oppression of feudal society. Atheism was an affirmation, what Kluge and Negt call "the reappropriation of the dead labor of generations that is sedimented into history." [25] Robespierre was criticized for his authoritarianism while Blanqui was sanctified for his populism.[26]

Freud saw in the totemic feast, repeated in the Christian mass, an enactment to alleviate the collective guilt for the murder of the primal father.[27] While the revolution had executed the monarch, the figure of Blanqui, and later Lenin, gave rise to death cults replete with iconic idealization and rituals of commemoration. In Freudo-Marxian terms, the cult of personality blocks the memory of the class struggle as a theory of political change. Yet the totemic dimensions of Blanquism served as a form of counter-memory, of what Benjamin called the "tradition of the oppressed." [28] Resisting the tendency of parliamentary and state socialism

to surrender to positivism and instrumentalism, Benjamin learned from the "failed" politics of Blanquism as he devised a materialist theory of history. The traditionalism of the Blanquists was redeemed in Benjamin's theory as a means of resisting the ideology of progress. Like all traditions, Blanquism had its festivals:

> Revolutionary days . . . were popular festivals of rebirth. They signified a metamorphosis of illusion and reality in the sudden manifestation of the hidden consciousness of the people. The potential power of the "damned of history" (the atheist pariahs who worked secretly for the intellectual liberation of mankind), which had seemed illusory to their enemies, was now revealed as real. The actual power of the reactionary forces who enjoyed privilege and position was at the same time revealed as an illusion.[29]

The ghosts of revolutionist populism also arose behind Bataille's theory of a "base materialism" that could never be fully appropriated by any economy of exchange. Those Marx condemned as the "alchemists of the revolution" [30] served as secret ingredients in Bataille's Gnostic and Benjamin's cabalistic experiments.

Because s/he inhabits a doubled space in which lost places and communities haunt the physical present, the exile is alert to the world of ghosts and is sentenced to a condition of perpetual mourning. Revolutionary conspirators were often emigres and political exiles.[31] While Benjamin investigates Blanqui's bohemian style of politics guided by Marx's critique, he pays close attention to what Marx called the phantasmagoria of the Second Empire. The spectral, fantastic images called up by commodity display that masked

political repression under Napoleon III were submitted to re-arrangement in Benjamin's montage style of criticism. So Benjamin's approach can be likened to a psychoanalytic process of working through the failure of the revolution, by means of dreams, memories, and fantasies re-combined through associative play.

The first phantasmagorias appeared in the aftermath of the French Revolution, as Etienne-Gaspard Robertson summoned the ghosts of Robespierre and Marat as special effects.[32] The crisis of legitimacy symbolically acted out by the decapitation of the monarch coincided with the emergence of scientific rationalism. The cynical contrivance of a compensatory spirit world foreshadows history in a televisual mode.

Marx saw the French inability to forget Napoleon as an attachment to a mythic Golden Age. In Freudian terms, the idealization of childhood served to cover for the buried traumas of infancy and the primordial experience of exile. Napoleon I provided the screen memory and the election of Napoleon III was the manifestation of a collective repetition compulsion. In the false light cast by Napoleon III's victory it is not surprising that Marx dismissed the politics of the conspirators who dreamed of a golden age in which the oppressed assumed their true place in history. The failure of Blanqui to seize power in 1848 meant that the mobilizing power of collective fantasy had been seized by the Right.

Benjamin, however, will choose to struggle against the fascist appropriation of myth by contesting the realms of social memory. In the sediment of history, beneath the ruins of historical catastrophe, stirred the experience that could once again disclose the seeds of revolutionary "innervation." Benjamin finishes his essay "The Paris of the Second Empire" this way: "Blanqui's action was the sister of Baudelaire's dream. The two are intertwined. They are the intertwined hands on a stone under which Napoleon III buried the hopes of the June fighters" (101). So the act of mourning assists the memory and hope of class struggle by fixing it in an emblem.

The decline of the Blanquists was a part of what Patrick Hutton calls the "politics of anniversary remembrance." The Blanquists maintained political solidarity through ritual commemoration of revolutionary martyrs. Each year they would visit the wall of Pere-Lachaise cemetery where the last militiamen of the 1871 Commune had been massacred (21). Funerals and commemorative ceremonies became the site for mass demonstrations and renewed confrontations with police (126-127). Hutton relates how this sense of solidarity gave way to one of consolation for a lost cause rather than genuine revolutionary possibility (139). Activism gave way to a static, repetitive *trauerspiel*: a frozen myth of failed revolution.

The example of Blanquism demonstrates how cultic beliefs and behaviors have the potential for both radical action and conservative nostalgia. Benjamin's work as a theorist was to

attempt to renew the active dimension of the cult historiographically even as--or particularly as--its reactive side gained force. Where Marx provided critique, Benjamin pursued redemption.

Working in the same realms of political myth as the Blanquists was the influential Georges Sorel, theorist of the general strike. Sorel argued for the superior power of apocalyptic imagery over any intellectual argument for the purposes of motivating mass action: his examples were early Christianity and the French Revolution. Violent upheaval was embodied in the image of a general strike that would capture the collective fantasies of the proletariat. The alienation of labor would be overcome through the establishment of a "society of heroes." Faith in the ability of myth to override rational thought leant Sorel's theory to fascism: he directly influenced both Mussolini's transformation from Socialist to Fascist and then Hitler's National Socialism.[33]

But before this both Benjamin[34] and Bataille[35] were attracted to Sorel. The intersection of aesthetics and politics that had its apocalyptic expression in the Third Reich had a complex prehistory which included movements like Blanquism whose influence was ultimately felt more strongly in the Nationalist Right than the Communist Left in pre-Second World War France.[36] On the other hand, the myth of the general strike is clearly at work in Eisenstein's early masterpieces of intellectual montage: Strike, Battleship Potemkin, and October.

The experimental reconstruction--both primal scene and dialectical image--takes place in a theater of ghosts and emerges in a space beyond conscious memory or willful nostalgia. Images of a lost Golden Age or homeland function as screen memories, displacements of buried traumas: in collective terms, political and social conflict. Because the "tradition of the oppressed" can only be encountered in the form of a representation that is always open to criticism for its sentimentality, "romanticism," cynicism, barbarism, etc. it remains in a realm of primordial difference that can only be posited as a phantom event.

Bourgeois identity is formed against the spectacle of a threatening hoard emerging in the social abyss of abject poverty.[37] The Nazis reduced their victims to levels of squalor and humiliation against which their own superiority could be verified. In either case the social other is made visible only in order to deny recognition of that others experience, memory, identity. This other history must be posited as a possibility that Benjamin's historical materialism hopes, in the face of permanent catastrophe, to redeem. Thus the capture of popular imagination by the oppressors does not refute but confirm the lesson offered by the history of the oppressed: that the "state of emergency" is not the exception but the rule.[38]

Bataille, in "the Psychological Structure of Fascism," noted how Hitler had drawn from the forces of social heterogeneity in order to manifest a sacred aura.[39] Both

Hitler and Louis Napoleon emerged from the ranks of the lumpenproletariate and simulated the authority that had been destroyed when the revolution decapitated the king: "Like Bonapartism, fascism . . . is no more than an acute reactivation of the latent sovereign agency" (149) and thereby the negation of the revolutionary forces it draws upon (153).

Our era continues to be defined by ethnic violence and racist ideologies: through geographic displacement more people than ever before should potentially be able to identify with the figure of the exile, but the--fundamentally communal--demands of mourning are difficult to meet, especially in situations of cultural isolation. If print literacy, spread by imperial and colonial expansion, laid the basis for the construction and assertion of national identities everywhere, then we increasingly belong also to those electronic communities that are no longer geographically fixed or determined. We need to learn how to mourn using the available forms of contemporary media if we are to understand our experiences of displacement and to recover something of our collective histories.

The global dispersion and displacement of ethnicities, traditions, and communities produces an effect of cultural heterogeneity out of which the homogeneity of TV culture can emerge as reactionary populism. On the other hand, the tradition of exile itself offers a redemption of the popular insofar as it remains attuned to the unspoken, the absent,

the unnameable and unrepresentable. Were the masses, as Freud and Adorno saw them, inherently reactive, rejecting the ethical burden imposed by exile and regressing into sacrificial representations? Or was there in the very heterogeneity of mass experience a counter-memory that opposed guilty-conscience with liberating utopian fantasies? Neither Bataille's heterogeneity nor Benjamin's tradition of the oppressed were presumed to be regressive in a Freudian sense. But they both required critical *awakening* in order to become effective opponents of the ideology of progress.

In opposition to any populism contaminated (as is Heidegger's *Volk*) by racist ideologies, Lyotard lists the voices of a counter-tradition: "Freud, Benjamin, Adorno, Arendt, and Celan--these great non-German Germans, non-Jewish Jews--who not only question but betray the tradition." [40] However, the question remains: *which* tradition? Lyotard continues: "whom emigration, dispersion, and the impossibility of integration make despair of any return" (93). One has to ask what has become of the (Brechtian?) "courage, humor, cunning, and fortitude" [41] that Benjamin calls upon in the "Theses."

The notion of a "tradition of the oppressed" inevitably imposes a certain homogeneity on historical experience. I have tried to show that Benjamin must be distinguished from both Freud and Marx as well as from his interpretation by Arendt and Adorno. Like Arendt in On Revolution,[42] Lyotard appears to consign mass experience to a silent misery, to the

unfreedom of biological necessity. Following the Frankfurt School, Lyotard refuses to posit this experience as a basis for political subjectivity (93). But the notion that all populism is ruined after Auschwitz refuses the legacy of Walter Benjamin (as well as betrays a Euro-centric bias). Benjamin's "tradition of the oppressed" must be situated in reference to that Forgotten that Lyotard as the refutation of all false solidarities. Benjamin's notion of tradition can be evoked not in the name of "the people" as a metaphysical presence but as a messianic hope.

TV offers us generational continuity across the ruins left by total war by its ceaseless reconstructions of[43] and replays from the previous era, creating a retrospective "age of television." For those who came to a consciousness of history in front of a TV set the earlier half of this century has become inseparable from TV images of it.

One way to approach TV experimentally would be under the double sign of Benjamin and Bataille and taking up the death cult as a primary means by which oppressed peoples and communities have been able to articulate counter-histories. Our emergence from the consciousness of previous generations can begin by learning to extract the historical experiences sedimented, through our libidinal attachments, in the transitory forms of TV culture. While this process of working through, on, and beyond these attachments is restrained in pop culture primarily by the demands of

commerce, it remains excluded from most academic practice on the grounds of professional ethics.

Benjamin and Bataille showed that "revolutionary nostalgia," even while it engaged with "fantasies" of primitivism and traditional wisdom was not the basis of fascism. Rather fascism was based in the appropriation through technology of social fantasies in their reified forms, masking its criminal alliance with capitalism with a mythic phantasmagoria. Benjamin's writings, saved from catastrophic destruction by Bataille, held onto the promise of redeeming experience and technology in the name of a tradition whose voice(s) remain(ed) unheard.

Notes

[1] Andreas Huyssen, "Adorno in Reverse: From Hollywood to Richard Wagner," New German Critique 29 Spring/Summer 1983, p. 21.
[2] Oskar Negt and Alexander Kluge, "The Public Sphere and Experience: Selections," trans. Peter Labanyi. October 46 Fall 1988.
[3] Origin of German Tragedy, p. 106.
[4] Michel Foucault, Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage, 1979) pp. 28-29.
[5] Michel Foucault, "What is an Author?" The Foucault Reader, ed. Paul Rabinow (London: Penguin, 1984) p. 102.
[6] see, for example, Iain Chambers, Popular Culture: The Metropolitan Experience (London, New York: Methuen, 1986).
[7] Charles Baudelaire, p. 75.
[8] Walter Benjamin: An Intellectual Biography, p. 205.
[9] Illuminations, p. 94.
[10] Visions of Excess, pp. 61-72.
[11] "The Public Sphere and Experience," p. 61.
[12] Walter Benjamin, "Goethe: The Reluctant Bourgeois," trans. Rodney Livingston. New Left Review No. 133 May-June 1982 p. 93.

[13] Georges Bataille, Death and Sensuality: A Study of Eroticism and the Taboo (New York: Arno Press, 1977) p. 87.
[14] Roland Barthes, Roland Barthes, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Noonday, 1977) p. 77.
[15] Teletheory, p. 121.
[16] Culture and Imperialism, p. 407.
[17] Sigmund Freud, Moses and Monotheism, trans. Katherine Jones (New York: Vintage, 1955) p. 69.
[18] Charles Baudelaire, p. 16.
[19] Richard D. E. Burton, Baudelaire and the Second Republic: Writing and Revolution (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991) p. 105.
[20] see Patrick H. Hutton, The Cult of the Revolutionary Tradition: The Blanquists in French Politics, 1864-1893 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981.
[21] Charles Baudelaire, p. 17.
[22] Marx-Engels Reader, p. 596.
[23] see Peter Stallybrass, "Marx and Heterogeneity: Thinking the Lumpenproletariate," Representations 31 Summer 1990 pp. 69-95.
[24] Illuminations, p. 260.
[25] "The Public Sphere and Experience: Selections," p. 80.
[26] Cult of the Revolutionary Tradition, pp. 48-50.
[27] Moses and Monotheism, p. 104.
[28] Illuminations, p. 257.
[29] The Cult of the Revolutionary Tradition, p. 52.
[30] cited by Benjamin, Charles Baudelaire, p. 17.
[31] see E.J. Hobsbawm, Primitive Rebels: Studies in Archaic Forms of Social Movement in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries (New York: Praeger, 1959).
[32] see Terry Castle, "Phantasmagoria: Spectral Technology and the Metaphorics of Modern Reverie," Critical Inquiry Autumn 1988 pp. 31-37.
[33] see Jack J. Roth, The Cult of Violence: Sorel and the Sorelians (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980).
[34] see "Critique of Violence," One Way Street, pp. 146-147.
[35] According to Allan Stoekl, "Truman's Apotheosis: Bataille, 'Plainisme,' and Headlessness," Yale French Studies 78 1990, pp 194-195.
[36] Cult of the Revolutionary Tradition, p. 171.
[37] see "Marx and Heterogeneity."
[38] Illuminations, p. 257.
[39] Visions of Excess, pp. 143-144.
[40] Heidegger and "the jews", pp. 92-93.
[41] Illuminations, p. 255.
[42] Hannah Arendt, On Revolution (New York: Viking, 1963).

43 This appears to be true of British television more than of American, no doubt because of the more direct destruction experienced by Britain during World War II.

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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Allen Meek was born in June 1961 in Auckland, New Zealand. In 1964 his family moved to Christchurch. During his years at Canterbury University he played in local New Wave bands. He received his Bachelor of Arts in History in 1981, the same year that he first came across Walter Benjamin's Illuminations. In 1983 he attended the School of Fine Arts at Ilam. In 1985 he moved to Wellington and worked in the National Library of New Zealand where he met his future wife, Rodnie Derrett. In 1987 he completed a second B.A. in English at Victoria University and in 1988 received First Class Honors in English. In 1989 he tutored briefly at Victoria University before moving to Gainesville, Florida to take up further graduate study. He received his Master of Arts in 1991. Later that year he visited New Zealand and was married in January 1992.

I certify that I have read this study and that in my opinion it conforms to acceptable standards of scholarly presentation and is fully adequate, in scope and quality, as a dissertation for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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